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The scope of *Studies in Russian & Soviet Cinema* (SRSC)

Studies in Russian & Soviet Cinema is a new, refereed journal devoted to pre-revolutionary, Soviet and post-Soviet Russian cinema, to its aesthetic development and its role between ideology and industry. SRSC invites contributions that constitute original research. The journal seeks to promote research from established scholars as well as to encourage researchers new to the field.

SRSC publishes articles on the history of Russian cinema (pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet); articles that examine aspects of cultural production; articles on individual actors, directors, and producers; articles on specific films; articles exploring the western reception of Russian cinema; translations of archival documents on Russian cinema; analyses of archival materials; film scripts; and book reviews of publications on Russian cinema.

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References

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Taylor, Richard (2000), 'But eastward, look, the land is brighter: towards a topography of utopia in the Stalinist musical', in Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (eds), *100 Years of European cinema: Entertainment or Ideology?* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 11–26.

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Editorial

Birgit Beumers

This issue of *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* begins with a sad note: the death, after a long illness, of Josephine Woll has left all of us who knew her and worked with her devastated. Josie's contribution to this journal has been enormous: she was one of the first scholars to join the editorial board. The support she has given the journal has been immeasurable: she has acted as adviser, judge and peer reviewer, but most important, Josie supported me as editor, friend and colleague in this venture from the start. The issue therefore begins with Denise Youngblood's obituary, where she honours Josie's life and work.

This issue contains five articles, the first two of which are devoted to Mikhail Romm's *Ordinary Fascism*. The Russian film historian Maya Turovskaya, who has recently received the NIKA award for her contribution to film scholarship, has written her contribution especially for the journal. She investigates the context of the film's premiere in the former German Democratic Republic, drawing on documents and her own memoirs (Turovskaya co-wrote the script for the film), thus providing unique insights into the mechanisms of Soviet censorship. I should like to thank here Cornelia Epping-Jäger and Sabine Hänsgen for their assistance in preparing this publication. Wolfgang Beilenhoff and Sabine Hänsgen then explore the narrative voice in Romm's film, offering a different approach to the documentary.

The issue continues with two articles by American scholars, Yelena Furman and José Alaniz, on two films of the 1990s: Alexander Sokurov's *Mother and Son* and Natalia Andreichenko's Ukrainian film *Shamara*. Then follows an article on the method of 'hyperkino', which has been developed and applied to annotate films. This method has been applied to the edition of *Engineer Prite's Project*, scheduled for release this summer by AbsolutMedien in Germany, and subsequently for a series of Soviet films that is due to be released in Russia by RUSCICO under the editorship of Nikolai Izvolov.

The document section contains a small sensation: Lars Kleberg had come across an article by Eisenstein published in *International Literature* in 1933. He sent this text to Richard Taylor, who suggested we revise the English translation and publish it in SRSC. In order to check it against the original, Naum Kleiman pointed out that the Russian original had never been included in the six volumes of Eisenstein's 'Collected Works', but only appeared in *Proletarskoe Kino* in 1932. Richard Taylor then used the original version to translate – for the first time in full – the article, which thus appears here for the first time in its entirety in English. My special thanks

in the preparation of this section go to Lars Kleberg, Richard Taylor, Naum Kleiman and Natalia Chertova (VGIK).

As always, I should like to thank Liudmila Mishunina and Elena Plotkina of *Iskusstvo kino* for their unfailing and invaluable assistance, and Ravi Butalia and Luke Roberts at Intellect and Jeremy Lockyer, our fine copy-editor.

I hope you will enjoy this issue, and look forward to receiving proposals, comments and submissions – at any time.

Obituary

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Josephine Woll, 1950–2008

Denise J. Youngblood *University of Vermont*

Josephine Woll, noted film scholar and Professor of Russian at Howard University, died at her home in Chevy Chase, Maryland on 12 March 2008 after a long, determined and courageous battle with colon cancer. Her death followed that of her husband of 31 years, Sovietologist and writer Abraham Brumberg, who passed away on 26 January 2008.

Woll was the daughter of Alice and the late Misha Woll and grew up in the Bronx, New York with her sisters Judy and Diana. She attended both public schools and secular Yiddish schools, before entering William Smith College at the age of 16. By the time she was 25, she had earned her master's and doctor's degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Apart from brief teaching stints at Duke University, Colgate College and the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, she spent her career at Howard, whose faculty she joined in 1977.

Like most scholars of Russian and Soviet cinema, Woll began her professional life as a student of Russian literature, and from the beginning her work was characterized by its impressive breadth and well as by its depth. Her MA thesis (1972) analysed the narrative voices of Poprishchin, Chulkaturin and the Underground Man; her doctoral dissertation (1975) examined the concept of tragedy in Pushkin's *Malen'kie tragedii* (1975). Woll's first book, a critical annotated bibliography of *samizdat* literature, went into a second, revised edition (1978, 1983). She then turned her attentions to Iurii Trifonov, work that culminated in a well-received monograph (1991). Although she focused on film studies in the second half of her career, as the bibliography below demonstrates, she continued to write on aspects of Russian literature.

Readers of this journal are, of course, most familiar with Woll as a film scholar and author of three books and numerous articles and film reviews on Russian cinema. Her major work on film, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (2000) is already a classic and will be the standard book on Thaw cinema for many years to come. This work, which is as important a contribution to the history of the Khrushchev era as it is to film history, is a model of film scholarship, exemplifying the strengths that characterize Woll's scholarship: her wide-ranging erudition, her unerring critical sense, her profound knowledge of Russian history and culture, and her research skills, interwoven through her graceful, seemingly effortless prose.



Figure 1: Josephine Woll during a symposium at the University of Pittsburgh.
Photo courtesy of Vladimir Padunov.

Text and context are inseparable. Julian Graffy, whose critical judgment Woll prized, sums up the importance of *Real Images* this way:

It is salutary to recall what critical material on Thaw period cinema was available to English-speaking scholars before this book appeared, and a sign of its achievement that it is difficult to imagine however we coped without it. What we coped with was a number of articles about *The Cranes are Flying*, *The Ballad of a Soldier*, *The Fate of a Man* and *Ivan's Childhood*, all of them great and innovative films, but all of them set in World War Two, and in that sense at odds with a very strong impulse in Thaw cinema, which was to tell new stories about the present.

Suddenly, with the appearance of *Real Images*, we had range, we had cogent analyses of literally dozens of films, and it has become a real and regular pleasure, after watching or re-watching a Thaw period film, to check to see what Woll has to say about it. The book follows the progress of some films from initial script to popular reception, while others are necessarily discussed more briefly, but it always has something innovative, acute and stimulating to say. It uses archival materials, including studio discussions and censorship materials. It considers the initial reception in newspapers and journals. It places the cinematic process of these turbulent, contradictory years in illuminating cultural, social and political context. It is written with elegance and wit. All these qualities have made it a model for those of us who aspire to write engaging and revealing studies of a group of Soviet films, linked either by time or by subject. It was extremely well received by scholars and is constantly used and quoted by grateful students.

(Julian Graffy in an e-mail to the author, 2 April 2008)

Among her other works, her personal favourite was her 2003 study of *The Cranes Are Flying*, a book that grew out of *Real Images*, but allowed her to undertake the kind of lengthy textual analysis that the comprehensive

format of *Real Images* did not. Her sensitive and astute examination of this canonical Thaw film is unlikely to be surpassed.

At the time of her diagnosis, Woll was embarking on a creative biography of Mikhail Romm. Sadly, that was not to be, but she continued to write film reviews and book reviews, as well as two articles, one on *Ordinary Fascism in Picturing Russia: Exploration in Visual Culture* (2008), which she was pleased to receive literally days before her death. The other, a sparkling analysis of *The Circus*, is scheduled to appear in summer 2008 in *Insiders and Outsiders in Russian Cinema*, a volume that is dedicated to her memory.

Along with the legacy of her published work, it is also important to remember the other ways in which Woll contributed to scholarship in Russian film and literature. She was a gifted editor. Her talents as an editor were well known to her colleagues, to whom she freely gave her discerning critical eye as a reader of many unruly manuscript drafts; she worked as a freelance editor after illness forced her to give up teaching. Her happiest editorial accomplishment, however, was shepherding Brumberg's memoirs, *Journeys through Vanishing Worlds* (2007), to publication before his death. Woll was also a generous mentor, who took a great interest in the careers of young colleagues and supported their work as a discussant on their conference panels and as a writer of many letters of reference. She was a compassionate reviewer: that rare academic who was totally without ego and knew how to maintain her critical standards without drawing blood.

When reviewing a scholar's lifetime accomplishments, it is all too common to overlook the backdrop against which they occurred. Woll's record of scholarly achievements becomes even more impressive when weighed against the particular challenges of her home institution, especially its lack of research support. Despite its pre-eminence as the leading historically black university in the United States, Howard has suffered from chronic underfunding, and during Woll's tenure, the faculty faced one major financial crisis after another.

There were other challenges as well. As a minority faculty member at Howard, Woll engaged with the thorny problems of race in the United States from a vantage point unusual for an American of European descent, which called upon and strengthened her natural empathy and humanity. As an example, not long after the Department of German and Russian merged with the Department of Romance Languages in the early 1990s, the new department was roiled by a political controversy over European languages. Some department members felt that French and Spanish were the only politically correct European languages for students of colour to learn and sought to end the teaching of German and Russian. Woll and others managed not only to persuade the faculty of German and Russian's importance to the foreign-language curriculum at any major university but also eventually to dissolve the tensions in the department over this fracas.

Another particularly fraught circumstance for Woll during her career at Howard occurred when the controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan gave an incendiary address to a packed audience at Howard. According to national press reports, this speech was profoundly anti-Semitic and well received by attendees. Woll dreaded going to her Russian class the next day. After a heavy and awkward silence, her students looking

away, Woll told them that she wanted to discuss the incident with them to clear the air. Like the master teacher that she was, she turned a difficult moment into an educational opportunity for herself and for her students. They quickly reassured her that they did not share Farrakhan's views on Jews but had not known how to address the subject with her.

Not only was Woll a superb scholar and dedicated teacher, she was also the hostess of a salon well known to Russian and East European specialists in the Washington area and beyond. In an interview with a *Washington Post* reporter shortly after Brumberg's death, Woll quipped that their home was known as 'Moscow on the Potomac'. An invitation to dinner *chez* Brumberg-Woll was not only an opportunity to savour Woll's excellent cooking, but also an opportunity to participate in spirited intellectual conversation in English, Russian, Polish and Yiddish with an invariably interesting mix of scholars, intellectuals, émigrés and political exiles. Woll and Brumberg were convivial hosts, and these dinners remain treasured memories for their guests.

As engaged as Woll and Brumberg were with the life of the mind, they also had a rich life apart. They were close to their extended family, especially to their youngest grandson, three-year-old Gabriel, who brought them great joy at a difficult time. They had a great capacity for friendship. The rich heritage of Yiddish culture was an important part of their lives. They loved music, and Woll particularly enjoyed playing the piano after resuming piano lessons as an adult. Woll and Brumberg travelled abroad as often as they could. They especially enjoyed travelling to England and France, spending part of many summers in the south of France. Woll spoke fondly of their trips as her favourite part of their life together.

As Woll's health began to deteriorate rapidly over the last few months, her major concern was not for herself but for her husband, whose health was also in steep decline. She was determined to outlive him, so that she could remain his primary support to the end. Brumberg's death, long expected but still a bruising shock, in a way gave Woll permission to let go. She lived her final days surrounded by her loving family and friends, and her sisters report that the end was peaceful. She is survived by her mother, her sisters, her two stepchildren and three grandchildren, and her many, many friends. She is profoundly missed but will live on through her writings and in the memories of those fortunate enough to have known her.

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Speaking about images: the voice of the author in *Ordinary Fascism*

Wolfgang Beilenhoff *University of Bochum (Germany)*

Sabine Hänsgen *University of Cologne (Germany)*

Abstract

This article deals with Mikhail Romm's film Ordinary Fascism (1965), which remains to the present day a most powerful reflection on fascism and the holocaust. The film follows on the one hand the tradition of earlier films about fascism and the holocaust, but differs in the commentary provided by the voice of the author. The analysis offered here focuses on Romm's strikingly everyday voice, which speaks with the intonation of dialogic situations and draws on a range of discursive devices, oscillating between traditional commentary, subjective intervention and ironic usurpation of film figures. The interaction of vocal performance, audio commentary and visual montage is then compared to the reuse, with different intent, of the same documentary footage in Hartmut Bitomsky's Deutschlandbilder (FRG, 1983) and Reichsautobahn (FRG, 1986).

Keywords

fascism
Stalinism
totalitarian culture
compilation film
voice of documentary
Mikhail Romm

In the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, Mikhail Romm's *Ordinary Fascism* (*Obyknovennyi fashizm*, 1965) was the first comprehensive attempt at cinematic reflection on fascism and – implicitly – on the USSR's own totalitarian past.

Ordinary Fascism belongs to the genre of 'compilation film', which Jay Leyda was concerned with at almost the same time. His book *Films Beget Films* deals with this genre, which effects a re-release of historical visual material. In this process, the rediscovered heterogeneous material is transposed into a new context at the cutting table. Ideally, the process can open up an 'alienating' view of the old material to the audience:

Any means by which the spectator is compelled to look at familiar shots as if he had not seen them before, or by which the spectator's mind is made more alert to the broader meanings of old materials – this is the aim of the correct compilation.

(Leyda 1964: 45)

The raw material from which Mikhail Romm selected his footage comprised two million metres of film (Nazi newsreels, documentaries and a special type of short film, the so-called 'Kulturfilme') that had been confiscated from the collection of the Reich Film Archives by the Red Army in 1945 and subsequently transported to Moscow.¹ This film material was supplemented by photographs, such as photographic portraits taken by Hitler's

1. On the transportation of the film archives of the German Reich to Moscow see Manewitsch (1995: 255–57).

2. See the exhibition catalogue *Hoffmann & Hitler: Fotografie als Medium des Führerkults*, ed. Herz (1994).
3. On the status of the soldiers' snapshots, see Reifarth and Schmidt-Linsenhoff (1997: 475–503); on the public debate concerning the Wehrmacht exhibition, see Heer (2002: 869–98).
4. On the use of these historical documents in the tradition of the compilation film, see Frieß (2003: 199–223).

personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann,² which had been kept in leather bags on the grounds of Mosfilm Studios (see Romm 1981: 298), or German Wehrmacht soldiers' private snapshots, which were to cause a sensation several decades later when they were shown in the first Wehrmacht exhibition in Hamburg in 1995.³ Some images were seen for the first time in the film *Ordinary Fascism*, others were already part of the collective memory.⁴ In addition, there was more film and photographic material belonging to eastern European legal authorities, as well as various other documents: drawings, the fragment of an amateur film from the Warsaw ghetto and images filmed much later – in the style of *cinéma-vérité* prevalent at the time – from the Museum of Auschwitz or shots of contemporary everyday life, filmed outside kindergartens or universities, and in the streets using a hidden camera. These shots not only created a reference to what was then the present day, but also demonstrated the discursive position from which the author intended to reflect on the past.

The production history of *Ordinary Fascism* is quite complex. After intensive viewing of the material from the Reich Film Archives, two young contemporary film critics, Iurii Khaniutin and Maia Turovskaja, approached Mikhail Romm with a concept for a script. The plan was to combine documentary material with excerpts from German feature films in order to extend the filmic reflection on fascism to the collective subconscious in the spirit of Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (see Turovskaja and Khaniutin 1988: 87–101). But Romm rejected the inclusion of feature-film material and insisted on the exclusive use of documentary material: 'those films simply made me cringe. The facial expressions, the make-up, the sets – everything revealed this art as false and old-fashioned. The drama seemed ridiculous to me. I just could not take it seriously' (Romm 1981: 301).

This remark demonstrates his rejection of any staging of an artificial, theatrical reality in the illusory space of a film studio, a process that had shaped the aesthetics of the personality cult in the Soviet Union and in whose development Romm had himself been decisively involved in with his feature films *Lenin in October* (*Lenin v oktjabre*, 1937) and *Lenin in 1918* (*Lenin v 1918 godu*, 1939). Therefore, the film *Ordinary Fascism* may also be seen as Romm's reflection on his own past as a director during the Stalin era, as a kind of repentance.

Obviously, it was the chance of developing a new analytical perspective on the traumatic complex of the totalitarian past through a filmic re-reading of the extensive documentary material that provided a challenge to Romm:

I began to collect material according to the following principle: everything relevant to Hitler came into one box of film, Göring came into another, a third box was reserved for people laying wreaths, a fourth for military parades, a fifth for cheering crowds, a sixth for the soldiers' everyday lives, and so on. I divided the material up into 120 possible themes – into civil and military, and themes from the pre-Hitler period and the Hitler period. The material was arranged under these topics and later put together into individual episodes.

(Romm 1965: 4)

Глава VIII

О СЕБЕ

„МОЯ МАТЬ БЫЛА ОБЫКНО –
ВЕННОЙ ЖЕНЩИНОЙ, НО ОНА
ПОДАРИЛА ГЕРМАНИИ ВЕЛИ-
КОГО СЫНА”

АДОЛЬФ ГИТЛЕР

Figure 1: First shot of chapter VIII: section of a page from the book *Ordinary Fascism*, typeset for publication in 1969 and published in a facsimile edition by Séance, St Petersburg in 2006. Courtesy of Liubov Arkus, Séance.

Chapter 8 of *Ordinary Fascism* may be used as an example to help clarify the montage and the author's voice-over commentary as specifically cinematic devices of re-reading the body of material assembled at this first stage. The chapter is entitled 'About Myself' and its theme – on the basis of material separated from its original context – is the cult image of the Führer. As a medium of self-staging, this was not only a constituent element of Stalinism, but also the heart of the National Socialists' visual policy. Ian Kershaw, for example, therefore speaks of the 'Führer cult' as the 'organizational principle, mechanism of integration and [...] central driving force' of National Socialism (Kershaw 2007: 14). Heinrich Hoffmann was given a decisive role in the staging of the Führer cult. It is therefore no coincidence that his photographic images of Hitler represent the starting point of Romm's filmic reflection on the image of the Führer.

The sequence begins with the text insert 'Chapter VIII. *About Myself*'. In the original Russian version, we both read and hear: 'My mother was an ordinary woman, but she gave Germany a great son (Adolf Hitler).' An unusual portrait follows. We see two shots of a cap and hear: 'My cap full face – my cap in profile'. In some way, the gesture of these photographs is expository, but at the same time grotesquely concretizing. Afterwards, we see a series of photos that originate from different contexts and show us a wide range of portraits of the Führer. The first image is a reproduction of Hoffmann's postcard 'The Chancellor at the Obersee near Berchtesgaden' from the year 1933 (see Herz 1994: 253). We hear the following commentary: 'Me against the background of the mountains'. Then, in parallel montage, there is – also as a postcard – Hitler in semi-profile by the sea: 'Me at the seaside'. This compact presentation of the image of a nature-loving,

private Hitler is followed by a development of the image of the Führer as a friend of animals. We see Hitler bending down to look at a squirrel, and hear: 'Me and a squirrel'. Corresponding to this, two further images of Hitler can be seen in front of a lion's cage with the commentary: 'Me and the lions'. Inserted between these two, we see the stereotype image of the Führer and a child: 'Me and a little girl'. In this sequence, consisting of only a few images, we encounter the visualization of a populist style of rule based on the themes of homeland, family, children and animals.

These images, conceived for circulation in the mass media, are followed by photographs that can hardly have been intended for public use. First of all, we see a monumental birthday cake with the ironic commentary: 'A cake, presented to me on my birthday. The cooks were searched, just in case.' Then, as commentary on a great pile of socks, we hear: 'More presents: Socks, knitted by German women.' In addition, we see a painting in which Hitler seems to have been placed in Siegfried's armpit, the commentary being: 'Me and Siegfried. Artist unknown'. It continues immediately with: 'Too bad I am looking out from under Siegfried's arms. Should be the other way round.'

Finally, a change of media follows, from still to moving images on the basis of material from Nazi newsreels. First, we see Hitler, looking off-screen in close-up: 'I am in a good mood.' Then, amidst a sea of flags but with a darker expression: 'In a bad mood, I don't recall what happened then.' In a medium shot, Hitler is asked for his autograph in a crowd, with Mussolini walking behind him: 'In a good mood again. Mussolini is in the background, but don't pay any attention to him yet. An autograph?' And a hunched back is commented on with: 'A good back would always be around.' After this, the scene changes to the staging of the image of Hitler as a statesman. First, we see Hitler in profile with his arms crossed: 'I cross my hands on my chest.' After this, his hands protect his private parts: 'Subsequently, I found another place for them.' The conclusion to this filmic *mise-en-scène* and simultaneous deconstruction of different Führer images is then provided by shots of Hitler as an orator.

What we have here is a cross-media ensemble of photographic, painted and cinematic images of the Führer. A visual argument is already implicit in this ensemble, but it is actually unfolded by means of the dominant *montage of attractions*, which Romm himself – referring back to Sergei Eisenstein – understands as a contrasting arrangement of surprising, shocking, affect-charged moments, which is not made plausible in narrative terms (Romm 1975: 272). From this point of view, the obviously repetitive structure of the presented sequence and the construction of visual rhymes do not so much aim at a recognition of similarities and differences between the images; in fact, this absurd agglomeration of similarly formed material leads to an ironic hyperbolizing of the elements of the Führer image (Romm 1981: 318).

The prerequisite for this is a systematic decontextualization of the material. None of the images shown remains in its original context. Torn out of their contexts and set into new ones, they become available for a discourse that presents different media images and image formats in a demonstrative way. A biographical discourse is suggested, beginning with the text insert 'About Myself' that performs through the medium of writing: initially, the viewer

is addressed as a reader. This written address is followed by photographs and film excerpts, which are not merely characterized by the pragmatic difference of public/private, but – to a similar extent – by the difference in media aesthetics between photography and film. Photographs appear to bring the film to a halt for a moment and open up the possibility of an analytical perspective by breaking up the filmic sequence into a sequence of individual images.

However, this vivisection of the Führer image does not result from the difference between photography and film alone; it also depends on the difference between image and sound. Initially, the film was assembled as a silent film, using a montage of attractions that arranges its material according to purely visual criteria. At this stage, it was of decisive importance that the montage did not aim to synchronize image and sound and thereby create the fiction of a synthetic whole. In fact, initially, it was a matter of combining the images as images before attributing any verbal meaning to them. A further semantic horizon was then added by means of the voiceover commentary:

We assembled the film as a silent film. I improvised the commentary section by section, without thinking about synchronization, without pursuing standardized 'documentary' effects, as an author's monologue, as if I was thinking about the material at that moment and calling upon the viewer to think about it, too. In my opinion, it was precisely this artistic means – the interaction of emotionally charged, artistic montage and author's monologue – that gave the film its special quality.

(Romm 1975: 279)

There was a long and intensive discussion as to which voice should be used to give the film its sound commentary. The spectrum considered ranged from the official radio speaker Iurii Levitan to the contemporary actor Innokentii Smoktunovskii and even the German actor and singer Ernst Busch (Turowskaja 2003: 198). But these possibilities, which represented customary commentary practice, were rejected. We hear none of the 'voice(s) of God' characteristic of traditional compilation films; these control the images from off-screen – having absolute authority – and thus attribute meaning to them. Nor do we hear any of those voices recorded as synchronized sound in the style of *cinéma-vérité*, which would produce the effect of immediacy and authenticity (see Nichols 1985: 258–73). The interview with contemporary witnesses, a technique emerging at that time, was not employed either. Instead, we hear a voice that moves between the conventional categories and identifies itself as the voice of the author himself.

It is Romm, therefore, whose 'voice is engaged [...] with the screen space' (Chion 1999: 50): incanting the images, so to speak, just as one would address a person possessed by evil spirits. It is a voice that is narrating, uncertain, questioning, reflecting, ironic, sometimes pathetic or horrified, a 'counter voice' to the other voice that is portrayed here. In repeated public speeches, the film lets us hear Hitler's voice, with its suggestive status as a 'voice not "naked", but impregnated by the [...] affirmative resonance of a mass audience' (Epping-Jäger 2003: 115). At the opposite end of this spectrum, we now have Romm's voice. It is a voice that makes use of the



Figure 2: Mikhail Romm during the sound recording of Ordinary Fascism. Photo reproduced here from the Séance publication, 2006, courtesy of Liubov Arkus.

microphone in an entirely different way. The recording technique makes it seem like a voice with no reverberation, no spatial resonance (Chion 1999: 50–51). For that reason, it is able to transform the images themselves into its body of resonance, while the text it speaks is a text that has emerged in a continuous process – from speaking about these images, from the incantation of these images.

Romm regularly explained the individual episodes to his colleagues orally, in improvised presentations of his work. Corresponding observations, ideas and questions entered into the commentary, which Romm developed through improvisation in order to begin a dialogue with the viewer. The pace of speaking was often altered in this process, sometimes there were slips of the tongue, and occasionally the sound recordings had to be repeated. The synchronization itself was developed in relatively long sections of about five minutes (Romm 1981: 323).

Romm's commenting voice constitutes a further device in the re-reading of the original documentary material, in addition to the montage of attractions, which concerns the images. This voice is not only characterized by its intimate proximity to the viewer's ear; the voice's own aspects of presence, eventfulness, embodiment and addressing are intensified by its speaking in a paradoxical deixis, for the sequence begins with the irritating statement: 'My cap full face – my cap in profile'. These are two phrases that not only ask

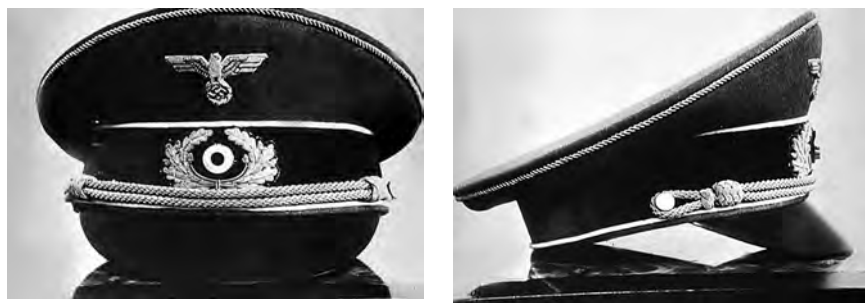


Figure 3: The cap full face and in profile. Photo reproduced here from the *Séance* publication, 2006, courtesy of Liubov Arkus.

who is speaking here and from where he is speaking, but simultaneously introduce a discursive position which is conveyed quite explicitly.

In structural and media terms, this voice is an off-screen voice, the voice of an external narrator and commentator. However, by contrast to the traditional off-screen voice – belonging to a character that leaves the diegesis for a limited period and operates off-screen – this voice does not originate from the narrative itself, ‘so that [...] its position [...] no longer corresponds with that of one character’ (Metz 1997: 44). The voice we hear here is no longer localized; it can no longer be pinpointed to any particular place in the diegesis. Not only can it be identified as the first-person voice, simultaneously – as a ‘juxtadiegetic voice’ – it has the possibility of intervening in the diegesis from the outside (Metz 1997: 123). Romm now exploits the specific media potential of the off-screen voice by awarding it the status of a grammatical person via ‘the film’s adoption of an imported deixis, that of language’ (Metz 1997: 117) and thus transforms it into a first-person voice that articulates itself grammatically and through the medium.

Since it is not part of the diegetic world itself, this voice can enter a different character by intoning the ‘Me’ rather than ‘HE’ from the first image of this sequence onwards: ‘My cap...’ – ‘Me and a squirrel’ – ‘Me and the lions’. In this way, the voice of the narrator – Romm’s voice – slips into a character in history, into the persona of Hitler. Thus this voice is not only a ‘counter voice’ to that of Hitler; in addition, by means of this pronominal borrowing, it becomes the voice of Hitler himself. The voice of the narrator exploits its omnipotence and enters the body of the enemy, becoming ‘diegetized’ for a moment. In this way, the first-person voice definitively exceeds the dimension of the commentary. While a commentary settles on the images from the outside, now we suddenly hear the same voice from inside, from within the image. The author and narrator hands his voice-over to a person in the narrative and makes this person say things that he himself would never say. The description of the images realized by this is tautological – from Hitler’s perspective, spoken in Romm’s voice.

Since there is no addressee within the film – the first-person voice does not address any character in the film – this voice is directed outwards, towards the viewer. We see images of the person Hitler, but hear a voice that comes from elsewhere and yet simultaneously claims, as an instance of discourse, to be Hitler’s voice. The voice of the author or narrator enters the film, the photographs and the historical documents for a moment before

5. On the complexity of this pronominal structure see Benveniste (1974: 279–85). The implications of this *shifting* become evident in the synchronizations of Romm's film. In the German Democratic Republic as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany synchronization of the author's voice was substituted by the voice of an actor, representative of the respective system: Martin Flörchinger read the commentary in East Germany, Martin Held in the West German synchronization. By contrast to the East German synchronization, in the West German synchronization the pronominal leap from 'HE' to 'I' that characterizes this sequence was not consistent, meaning that we hear, in the tradition of auctorial commentary, maintaining distance: 'He against the background of the mountains', 'He at the seaside' and so on.
6. Bitomsky was inspired to make his film essay *Reichsautobahn* by his research on the National Socialist cultural film; see Bitomsky (1983: 443–51).
7. For a theoretical reflection on the 'freeze frame', see Bellour (1990: 99–124).

withdrawing again. The viewer hears a person speak who – in media terms – is silent in the photographs. He hears this character say something, he has the impression that he is experiencing the character from within, as a first-person voice, and at the same time from outside, from a narrating position: 'The voice thus succeeds in exercising an "I-effect" without losing the power of the HE' (Metz 1997: 125). This pronominal shifting from the expected 'HE' to the paradoxically employed 'I' thus demonstrates, on the level of the voice as well, the ambivalence between analytical distance and personal involvement that is a prerequisite for the ironic usurpation of the person of Hitler by the author and narrator Romm.⁵

This sequence, therefore, involves a double dismantling of the Führer cult. On the one hand, it takes place on the level of the images through the device of the montage of attractions, on the other hand through the device of voice-over commentary. While the montage leads to visual hyperbolizing, a paradoxical division of the customary off-screen voice is realized in the voice itself.

Finally, the device of commentary by the author's voice can be re-examined in the comparison of two sequences from different films referring to one and the same set of historical material. This is documentary material from the beginning of the construction of a stretch of the motorway (*Autobahn*) in Frankfurt am Main on 22 September 1933, which became the object of a filmic re-reading in both Romm's *Ordinary Fascism* and Hartmut Bitomsky's film essay *Reichsautobahn* (West Germany, 1986).⁶ Romm comments on the shots in the following way:

Attention! A special tipper of earth has been emptied out already. Now the Führer's hand takes up the shovel. [original sound (echoing): 'Heil!'] But let us take another look, so that you can see the man standing *behind* Hitler. There ... (freeze frame!) there ... (freeze frame) ... and there (freeze frame). Construction of the second autobahn is opened by Göring. [original sound (echoing): 'Heil!']
The third by Hess.
The smaller highways were opened by smaller Führers. And they dig so sluggishly.

Romm aims to reach a wider audience with his words, and for this reason he chooses an appellative form of address and apparently popular rhetorical figures in his commentary on the film images. He sums up in words what can be seen in the pictures. However, by contrast to the sequence previously analysed, one can observe a return of the personal pronoun 'HE' in reference to Hitler here. Ironic ambivalence shifts towards a more obvious assessment, a direct polemic in the style of antifascist rhetoric of the Cold War period. One indication of this is the metonymic reduction of Hitler's person to the 'Führer's hand [taking up the shovel],' which triggers a rather ridiculous effect.

The device of voice-over commentary is intensified in the visual dimension. After signalling his intention in the commentary, Romm makes the film image stop three times, held in a 'freeze frame'⁷ and then repeated. This multiple stoppage of the time flow breaks up the fascination of the collective experience staged in the film image; the ritual



Figure 4: Sequence of images of Hitler at a motorway construction site in Ordinary Fascism. Photos from the authors' archive.



Figure 5: Sequence of images of Hitler at a motorway construction site from Hartmut Bitomsky's Reichsautobahn. Photos from the author's archives.

is perforated, and the pathos is given comic features. Through the exaggerated repetition of the motif of shovelling, the sequence is heightened into a satirical unmasking of the Führer cult: Hitler is set into a sequence with Göring, Hess and finally an entirely unknown party leader and thus appears as only one among many within a levelling, serial structure.

The film *Reichsautobahn* by German film-maker Hartmut Bitomsky is a film essay, addressing a smaller circle of intellectual viewers. His description of the images in the commentary is correspondingly intoned in a more thoughtful manner – almost as if he were conversing with himself. Bitomsky is aiming at image analysis: he describes choreographies of movement and also shifts the viewer's attention to trivialities. This way, Bitomsky confronts the mythology of the images with their factographic description. He also brings the film to a standstill; however, it is not in a 'freeze frame' in his work, but a change in media takes place from documentary film images to photography. The filmic sequence is broken up into a series of individual photographic images, whereby the photographs are presented in their specific materiality as paper images. The author himself picks up a pile of photographs and develops his commentary while looking at them:

Even in the future, it may prove impossible to eradicate the accidental phenomenon of shovelling sickness among construction workers.

September 23rd, 1933 in Frankfurt am Main: Hitler and the first cut of the spade. He works flat out. He shovels and shovels and simply won't stop. It wasn't supposed to look like a symbolic act. The *Gauleiter* behind him wants to take a close look. He reacts to every movement with a counter movement. When Hitler moves to the right – he moves to the left. A small pantomime of double strategy. The worker next to Hitler continues enthusiastically. He threatens to block our view of the Führer, but someone in the background makes sure he leaves the image. Later, wondrous stories are told about the sand that Hitler shovelled.

Compilation films about Hitler and the Third Reich have been in great demand during the last decades. Due to continued audience interest, numerous television documentaries were made – in Germany, the productions by Guido Knopp for the ZDF section 'Zeitgeschichte' (contemporary history) deserve to be mentioned here. These compilations operate with a very limited range of images, which constantly appear in new variations and contexts. We are facing a permanent recycling of similar images which, detached from any reference to a specific event, function as abstract symbols or allegories illustrating a voice-over commentary that guides the viewer, and promising a comprehensive insight into the course of history (see Zimmermann 2005: 710–19).

Auteur cinema has devised certain strategies of intervention that are directed against such a recycling of images of National Socialism in the mainstream mass media. In his recently published reflections on the 'double' status of these images, which, as documents, are supposed to illustrate and criticize fascism at the same time, Harun Farocki quotes considerations of Hartmut Bitomsky which he laid out in the commentary of his film *Deutschlandbilder* (West Germany, 1983):

There was never a moment of iconoclasm in Germany that destroyed the films in a first act of outrage. The films were confiscated, and that is something different. They were locked away, there was still a plan for them. Similar to prisoners who can be ransomed, they are allowed to come out. It has to be made sure that context and careful dosage render them harmless. This is a circumscription of their usage as documents, and as such, they are entrusted with a twofold function. They are supposed to show how fascism really was, they are supposed to say what fascism said at that time. The old message, once more. But this time, as a message of terror. [...] And, simultaneously, they are supposed to testify against themselves, as one would do it with agents who defected and were turned. And they speak, and it is a fact that we still understand them. We are not confronted with some incomprehensible babble or stammering of a foreign language we cannot work out. And then, there is this other fact of their availability: these films not only survive this procedure that converts them into principal witnesses – they almost put themselves forward for it. As if this were exactly their purpose: to play the role of documentary evidence.⁸

8. Commentary track from the film *Deutschlandbilder* by Hartmut Bitomsky and Heiner Mühlenbrock (1983), quoted in Farocki (2007: 296).

A critical reflection on the instrumentalization of documents as mere means of evidence, as demanded by auteur cinema, had already been achieved by Romm in the 1960s through the use of montage and voice, thereby establishing a tradition of subjective intervention in the compilation film genre. The voice of the author creates a reference to one's own present, marks the place from which one speaks as that of a contemporary commentator and, as a result, does not present history as a concluded period. This is made possible through a montage that establishes new relationships between the images and thus creates intervals through which analytical potential can unfold.

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Some documents from the life of a documentary film

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Translated by Birgit Beumers

Abstract

This article investigates, through personal memory and archival documents, the release and fate in distribution of the film Ordinary Fascism. The author co-wrote the script for this documentary by the well-known Russian filmmaker Mikhail Romm. The premiere in Leipzig at the documentary festival appears to have been a fortunate coincidence, since Ordinary Fascism was later shelved in both the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union. With the help of documents located in the Bundesarchiv and personal memories this article pieces together what might have made it possible at all for the film to emerge in Leipzig in 1965, and what might have been the reasons for the film's controversial status.

Keywords

documentary film
fascism
Soviet–German
cultural relations
Mikhail Romm
Leipzig Documentary
Film Festival

In the forty years that have passed since Mikhail Il'ich Romm, Iurii Mironovich Khaniutin and I prepared the book *Ordinary Fascism* for publication,¹ I have already written a number of articles about the film *Ordinary Fascism* (*Obyknovennyi fashizm*): about how it was conceived and implemented; about Romm as a director and as a man; about my co-authorship with Khaniutin; about 'alienation' as a way of self-knowledge; or about the use of photos in the structure of the film. Only incidentally and occasionally would I remember the fate of the completed film. Meanwhile, in the history of Soviet cinema, a film passing censorship – not to mention distribution – is not just a part of film history, but it is often its most unpredictable, irrational and adventurous part.

Unfortunately, after those forty years, I am no longer able to restore in a precise and punctuated manner the complex and uneasy relationship of *Ordinary Fascism* with the authorities. Maybe other historians will find some traces in the archives that have now opened. But a lot will remain in the sphere of what we used to call 'the evidence of the telephone'. Some documents have been located in the German Bundesarchiv by my colleagues Cornelia Epping-Jäger and Sabine Hänsen, who have been working on this project at the University of Cologne and who have generously shared their findings with me.

1. The film script, richly illustrated with the photographic documents used for the making of the film, was scheduled for publication in 1969 with the publishing house Iskusstvo, where it was halted. The St Petersburg publisher Séance, under the editorship of Liubov Arkus, printed the original version (using the layout of 1969) in 2006 [BB].

2. BArch DR 140, A 987. [Quelle Epping-Jäger].
3. BArch DR 140, A 987. [Quelle Epping-Jäger].
4. Zara Abdullaeva, *Kira Muratova: iskusstvo kino*, Moscow: NLO, 2008, p. 45.

Who said meow?

We shall start, strangely enough, with a letter discovered in the archives by my colleague Cornelia Epping-Jäger from the 'German Democratic Brothers' to Romm:

Comrade Mikhail Romm
Mosfilm Studio, Moscow
17 June 1965

Dear Comrade Romm,

Unfortunately I had no opportunity to make your acquaintance while you worked at the State Film Archive in Babelsberg. But I have heard a lot about your film [...] The State Film Archive is in the process of preparing a retrospective on 'The international documentary about the fight against fascism' for this year's documentary film festival in Leipzig [...] I would like to ask you whether you would be prepared to show your film in the context of this retrospective [...] I am fully aware that the final answer to this question depends on whether or not your film will be submitted as an official festival entry. In that case we shall of course not hinder that process. [...]

With best wishes
Klaue, Head of the Science Section²

Romm answered the young employee of the festival on 8 June 1965 that the film 'Alltäglicher Faschismus' (thus we had translated the title for ourselves) would be ready for the festival, but that its status in the festival programme depended on Goskino and the Film-makers' Union. Therewith Romm handed Klaue's invitation to the vice-president of Goskino, Vladimir Baskakov.³ Thus the words 'festival' and 'Leipzig' sounded even before the film had been completed. In the meantime, however, another decisive, but not obvious event happened. The film had to receive approval in order to see the light of the day or, in bureaucratic parlance, 'the permission certificate'. This was no simple formality. The Thaw cinema, expressing discontent across a wide range of areas – from the level of film language up to individual 'rebellious' retorts – was generally suspicious to the vigilant eye of various authorities. The scriptwriter Natalia Riazantseva writes: "There was a jargon, "passability", "impassability"; there were dozens of ways of masking true intentions."⁴ But if somebody thinks like Hamlet that 'though this be madness, yet there is method in't', he is wrong. The various levels of authorities as a whole, in their totality, formed a kind of colloid, vibrating environment. Shocks, fears and phobias of the officials at all levels were often as unpredictable and accidental as their sudden impulses of boldness, or at least common sense. The intermediate chapter between the final credits and the screen release of almost any even remotely important film of this cinematic period turned into something like a detective story with a 'bad' or 'good' ending. *Ordinary Fascism* fortunately had a happy ending: at least for the time being.

In the perestroika era when the 'forbidden' cinema was 'unshelved', it was most difficult to guess where the root of the evil had been buried. A film's passage through the bureaucratic apparatus became the sum of manifold interests, hierarchies, connections, intrigues, loud scandals and undercover struggles that left no written traces.

Those who could remember what happened with *Ordinary Fascism* on this journey have passed away long since. On the one hand, the 'impassability' of the film was obvious: when it came to the book version, they would close it. On the other (positive) hand, the charisma of the director's name meant that an interdiction would be fraught with scandal; besides, there was the declared anti-fascist theme... I have already written about the fact that the film's fate was composed of a series of largely favourable coincidences. Probably the time had come for something like that.

However, together with my co-author Khaniutin, we were quite removed from the 'spheres' and learnt about what was happening and how things were moving only through Romm himself. Sadly my memory has not retained every detail.

After the completion of the film Romm told us that he had turned to his 'political' consultant Ernst Genri,⁵ who had recommended showing the film to the so-called 'Andropov Boys'. As Fedor Burlatskii recalls: 'I supervised a group of consultants, advisers to the department which was headed by Iurii Vladimirovich Andropov in the Central Committee of the Party'. This was a rather unique circle, the first group of intellectuals in the Central Committee, which had been created under the initiative of Andropov and his deputy to Lev Nikolaevich Tolkunov. This group included such people like Aleksandr Bovin, Georgii Arbatov and Georgii Shakhnazarov.⁶

I remember how a viewing was arranged in one of the small work-rooms at Mosfilm. Iurii Khaniutin and I were led into the room when the lights had already been dimmed, and we left before the lights came up again. We were not present during the conversation that Romm had with the above-named intellectuals. However, Burlatskii remembered another viewing – there were probably a few, in different places and at different times, and Burlatskii's memories are as incomplete and sketchy as mine. This was an 'internal' viewing for advisers at 'Gorky's dacha', where the group worked for a long time.

There everybody enthusiastically met M.I. [Mikhail Il'ich] and this film [...] I remember Sasha Bovin, the most uncontrollable person when it comes to expressing an opinion, speaking about analogies directly and openly. He used the phrase that there should be a continuation, 'Ordinary Stalinism', [...] Shakhnazarov [...] also spoke about the creative side, about artistic devices [...] Shakhnazarov and I were at Andropov's and told him that a viewing had taken place, that this is an outstanding event [...] because for the first time it shows the nature of this phenomenon – a monstrous dictatorship which [...] was genuinely supported by the people's masses [...]

A. [Andropov] listened to us attentively, and said that he had not seen the film, but that he had heard about it and generally supported it [...]

He was not a rigid and resolute [...] but consistent enough critic of Stalin and Stalinism and, in particular, of course, of the repressions: he himself had almost fallen victim to the 'Leningrad affair'.⁷

According to Burlatskii's evidence they were no more than advisers, but from those conversations with Romm I nevertheless gained an unauthentic impression that the idea of the roundabout ways of the premiere via

5. Ernst Genri (real name Semen Rostovskii), Komintern agent, publicist and expert on fascism, author of *Hitler over Europe* (1934) and *Hitler against the USSR*, 1936. [BB].
6. Fedor Mikhailovich Burlatskii: member of the Department for Liaisons with Communist and Workers' Parties in Socialist Countries of the Central Committee. Iurii Andropov (1914–1984): Ambassador to Hungary in 1954; from 1957 to 1967 head of the Department for Liaisons with Communist and Workers' Parties in Socialist Countries; from 1967 to 1982 head of the KGB; in May 1982 succeeded Mikhail Suslov as head of ideology in the Central Committee; in November 1982 succeeded Brezhnev as general secretary of the CPSU. Lev Nikolaevich Tolkunov (b. 1919), correspondent for *Pravda*, later editor of *Izvestiia* and head of news agency APN; Aleksandr Bovin (1930–2004), journalist, publicist and diplomat, speechwriter for Brezhnev; from 1972 to 2001 political correspondent of *Izvestiia*. Georgii Arbatov (b. 1923), political scientist, specialist on America, head of Institute for US and Canada of the Academy of Sciences

- (ISKRAM) from 1967 to 1995. Georgii Shakhnazarov (1924–2001), political scientist and politician, adviser to Gorbachev; his son is the film-maker Karen Shakhnazarov [BB].
7. Fedor Burlatskii in an interview with Grigorii Durnovo on 21 January 2008. [The Leningrad affair refers to the trials of the late 1940s and 1950s against Party and Soviet officials accused of treason; BB]
 8. 'Despite the fact that the film *Ordinary Fascism* was released after the approval in the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU...'. From a letter by Romm to L.I. Brezhnev about the obstacles on work on an anti-fascist theme. In Valerii Fomin (ed.), *Kinematograf ottepli: Dokumenty i svidetel'stva*, Moscow: Materik, 1998, pp. 173–74.
 9. Konrad Wolf (1925–82): film director who left Nazi Germany for Moscow in 1933; studied at VGIK; since 1965 head of the Academy of Fine Arts in the German Democratic Republic. Brother of Markus Wolf (1923–2006); head of General Reconnaissance Administration of GDR State Security [BB].
 10. Before the war I went to the Friedhoff Nansen School No. 110 in Moscow

Leipzig came from Andropov (however, as we have seen, the initiative originally started in Leipzig itself).

We are probably not wrong when we assume that there were forces at work that supported the film and others that did not, so that its final destiny was resolved – as appears from Romm's subsequent letter to Brezhnev – at the level of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU⁸ (films then seemed a matter of State importance). Here I reiterate my hope that whatever traces there may be of the intrigues and fights that then shattered the Soviet Elsinore, researchers will ultimately discover them. Someone apparently suggested the move of placing the premiere outside the brackets of the undercover struggle and inside an international festival, so that the film would return to the Soviet Union with the approval of the 'German comrades'. This connection is obvious from the dates: the film received the approving certificate 334/65 on 15 October 1965; the premiere at the festival's opening took place on 13 November; and already in March 1966 the film was released in Russia. But whoever gave their deciding Party 'meow' – the initiative belonged to Leipzig.

The film's rise and fall

If from the Soviet end of the intrigue I remember the viewing for a young group of Party functionaries, then from the German end there was Konrad Wolf's⁹ story about how he – at that time not only a film-maker, but already the president of the German Democratic Republic's Academy of Fine Arts, showed the film to the then general secretary of the SED [Socialist Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic] Walter Ulbricht. Konrad was a graduate of Moscow's Film Institute VGIK and, even if not directly a participant of his workshop, all the same a pupil of Romm. This ancient story was confirmed to me, shortly before his death, by the former chief of the GDR secret service, Markus or Misha Wolf, also known as the 'man without a face' and brother of Konrad Wolf. I had reserved further questions for the next meeting, but that never took place.¹⁰ Having remarked that personally he did not hold Ulbricht in high esteem, Misha Wolf said that Konrad, on the contrary, was close to him. As the majority of VGIK students dearly loved Romm, he had taken it upon himself to show the film to the Party boss. True, Misha thought that Ulbricht did not understand artistic matters too well, but it would have been strange to assume that there could have been an independent decision on a similar question, sidelining Moscow. Hence it is more likely there was some agreement. But, as we shall see, not everything was clear with 'the final decision'. Besides, according to other evidence, if not the General Secretary himself, then his wife Lotte was vividly interested in cinema and even leaned upon decisions.

During the memorable fiftieth festival in Leipzig in 2007 I managed to see its jubilee guests. Unfortunately, the former director of the festival, Wolfgang Harkenthal¹¹ – as well as many others – was no longer alive. But his manuscript notes have been assembled by his successors Ronald Trisch and Christiane Mückenberger. They have kindly given me the opportunity to get acquainted with his records concerning *Ordinary Fascism* in Leipzig, for which I am deeply indebted to them. The picture that emerged reflects the atmosphere of the ongoing 'decision-making', which echoes the shakiness of the situation.

Goskino in Moscow had registered its festival entries on time and the prints arrived in Leipzig punctually. Among them was a full-length film by Mikhail Romm, *Ordinary Fascism* (*Der gewöhnliche Faschismus*). The film had not yet reached the audiences in Moscow when it came to us in Leipzig. That was already a small sensation. Moreover, there was another one, when Romm's participation in the festival was confirmed.

The selection commission was inspired when it found that the film was 'something very special and had the greatest potential for receiving a "Golden Dove"'.

The amusing misunderstanding about Romm's arrival could be neglected here, but it also contributed in its own way to the atmosphere of some nervous sensation. Harkenthal raced to Berlin to meet Romm, invited reporters – and suffered a failure: flights were cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. The next day, for lack of time, he sent his wife to the airport Berlin Schönefeld. She tried to afford a pleasant greeting to the well-known visitor, and met him with the Russian words 'Do svidaniia' (Good-bye)! Fortunately Romm had a good sense of humour, and no diplomatic incident ensued.

On 13 November 1965 the festival solemnly opened with *Ordinary Fascism*, but, in a strange turn of events, the film's official status had still not been decided. On 14 November Baskakov, the deputy head of Goskino, was asked at a press conference whether the film was in the competition. Harkenthal remembered:

Unfortunately it was not. And we were not quite sure how to relate to the film, which had been shown for the opening of the festival. Somehow there was a hesitance on the Soviet side in all matters concerning this film. Baskakov left it to us when answering the question: the decision was up to the festival committee.¹²

A strange compliance for the Soviet equivalent of a deputy minister, whom we remember as a rather authoritarian man. It was especially strange to solve the issue about whether the film was a competition film or not en route, as it were. The report of the meeting of the Soviet delegation with the minister Dr Witt, which is preserved in the Bundesarchiv, took place on the same day: 14 November, of course – in a 'cordial and friendly atmosphere'; it sheds some light on the back-stage action of *Ordinary Fascism*.

We asked for the film *Ordinary Fascism* to be included into the competition programme. Comrade Witt expressed the firm conviction that the film would find an appropriate degree of acknowledgement from the jury (we remember that the international jury included Marcel Martin, Ivor Montague, Theodor Christensen, Jerzy Bossak, etc.). The Soviet side understood this suggestion, but asked for permission to give its final decision in the course of the same day. In this they were motivated above all by the desire not to demote to second place the work of Comrade Roman Karmen, who had an enormous significance for the history of socialist film art.¹³

From these brief minutes discovered by Cornelia Epping-Jäger it is obvious that Goskino had another favourite: *The Great Patriotic* (*Velikaia otechestvennaia*,

with Konrad and Misha Wolf, as well as many other 'foreigners', so we knew each other since childhood. I worked with Konrad on his film *Ernst Busch Sings*; I did not meet Misha during his time as general. He approached me during the opening of the exhibition 'Moscow-Berlin' in Berlin in 1994.

11. Wolfgang Harkenthal (1922–2006): left the Leipzig festival in 1974 for Progress Film; Trisch and Mückenberger joined Leipzig in 1973 [BB].
12. Wolfgang Harkenthal, *Ein Leben fuer das Kino*, unpublished manuscript, pp. 59–61.
13. BArch DR1, file 4276 [Quelle Epping-Jäger].

14. Flörchinger (1909–2004): since 1957 actor at the Berliner Ensemble; in 1976 moved to West Germany. Held (1908–92): actor at Schauspiel Berlin (West). Herlinghaus (1931–88): journalist and film scholar [BB].
15. Wilhelm Roth, *Ein Meilenstein: Der gewöhnliche Faschismus. Bilder einer gespaltenen Welt: 50 Jahre Dokumentar- und Animationsfilmfestival Leipzig*, ed. by Ralf Schenk. Berlin, 2007, p. 43.

1965) by Roman Karmen; and that, when sending Romm's film to the festival, it could not determine its status, because the decisions were apparently taken at different levels and through different channels (here somewhere, probably, fits the Wolf's screening to Ulbricht). Minister Witt promised that some public prize would be found for Karmen, and the delegation communicated with the bosses, or left the decision to the more informed German side: as it were, they changed the horses in the middle of the race. Harkenthal confirmed: 'Thus it was clear that the film would be declared as a competition entry and it won, of course, the Golden Dove in the category of full-length films.' For this purpose it was necessary to change the festival regulations, because such a nomination did not exist. The unanimous jury decision was to award a 'special jury prize'; to this came also the GDR Press Prize. During the festival screening Romm's voice-over was dubbed by Hermann Herlinghaus who, according to Harkenthal, had had an opportunity to prepare for the task with Romm's help. 'The two German film versions, with Martin Held (West) and Martin Flörchinger (Ost)¹⁴ were good, but they could not reach Herlinghaus's live performance', as the western journalist Wilhelm Roth remembered.¹⁵ The film thus received its certificate both at home and in the German Democratic Republic, and a year later Khaniutin and I toured several GDR cities with the German synchronized copy, showing the film with subsequent discussions.

Such discussions, however, had taken place already at the festival, where, according to Harkenthal,

[...] people saw 'intentions' of the director, parallels were drawn to the contemporary politics of Party and State. Thus the film had quite a number of screenings in its dubbed German version, but that too would soon be over. The film was kept under 'seal' and was released for screenings on request only by HV Film for single, non-public screenings; the same happened in the USSR as well.

This strange duality would accompany the film. On the one hand, Romm would be sent to Paris to participate in the dubbing of the film into French and English. The film's destiny in distribution would develop in the happiest way. To prove the case, I quote Romm's letter to Brezhnev that has already been mentioned.

[...] only for the first months [11 months is the distribution period at the time when this was written – MT] each of the two series were seen in our country by 20 million spectators – a number hitherto unknown for documentary films [...] In a number of countries (for example in Hungary, Switzerland, Holland, etc.) the ministries and mayors' offices of large cities made the film compulsory viewing for all sixth-formers and students [...] It has been bought by some fifty countries.

But on the other hand, Romm gave all these arguments as a complaint about the difficulties with the film.

The incident in the German Democratic Republic is interesting because the 'secondary' destiny of the film – after the festival award, after Romm's

election to the GDR's Academy of Fine Arts – is fully documented. Even if researchers will not find the Soviet decrees issued by the 'army of the arts', to speak with Mayakovsky, the documents found by Sabine Hänsen in the Bundesarchiv allow us to inspect the uninterrupted mechanism of permanent ideological vigilance.

Protocol 16/66 contains the German 'permission certificate'; the top line reads: 'Date of Permission: 12–20 October 1965, Acquisition: Moscow' and this may mean that the Soviet certificate was not shown by the delegation or that the date of 15 October was inserted later. Children under 14 years old were not to be admitted, and Romm's participation in the German synchronization of the film was specified in the note. The report specifies also the licence terms: 'The film is permitted for public screenings after synchronization into German. Term of permission: 5 years [...] 3 March 1966'. Thus the certificate had validity until 1971.¹⁶ Of course, the acquisition was substantiated with all the appropriate words about the showing of the roots and purposes of fascism, in particular Hitler's dictatorship and, of course, about West Germany.

Moreover, the Bundesarchiv documents contain the discussion of the dub: the translation had been completed by Renate Georgi, the synchronization was directed by Ernst Dahle, and the text was read by the actor of the Berliner Ensemble Martin Flörchinger (in the prologue Romm gave him the right to speak). However, a confidential document dated 11 May 1967 (thus a year later) contains an additional protocol to agreement 16/66, which – in a stunning U-turn, actually recalls the permission. In other words, it puts the already permitted and released film back 'on the shelf': 'This film will be withdrawn from distribution with immediate effect; copies of the film must be returned to VEB Progress Film Vertrieb. Two copies are to be submitted to the GDR State Film Archive, and these may be shown only with permission of HV Film.' The substantiation of this decision is not without bureaucratic grace and wit: 'This film has been analysed in the film theatres of the GDR and on German Television. The intended effect of the film on the GDR population has been achieved. Therefore the film may be withdrawn from circulation.' The film had done its job, and that was that. Actually, a year is a considerable term for a film in distribution, but if it had already recouped its costs, then why an interdiction? The notes bring us back to the familiar atmosphere of the 'telephone evidence' and other undercover intrigues:

On the order of the representative of the Ministry of Culture and the Head of HV Film, Comrade S. Wagner, who had a telephone conversation with Comrade Professor Kurt Hager (Central Committee), the film should be withdrawn from circulation immediately. No reasons have been given, but the matter should be handled without drawing any attention to the case. Signed Deckers.

(BArch DR1/361)

In short, the film was put 'on the shelf' on the basis of a telephone call from the Central Committee, and it would be easiest to see Moscow's hand in this. But from the internal note (Hausmitteilung 14 December 1967) from the same head of department to the same Wagner, it emerges that

16. BArch DR1 MfK–HV Film: 3616; (hereafter as BArch DR1/3616). [Quelle Hänsen].

even the Soviet embassy had to be put right when they intended to show the film for the October anniversary, apparently unaware of the fact that the film 'had been withdrawn for reasons of which you know'. Thus Deckers asks for instructions from above on how to behave in similar cases, as the film has been withdrawn by some order 'and we have not been informed about the precise reasons for the withdrawal' (BArch DR1/3616). As appears from the note (Aktenvermerk 14 December 1967), Minister of Culture Wagner was not fully aware of the reasons either; he answered only that 'he was not going to contact the USSR Embassy but advise Comrade Professor K. Hager when the opportunity arises' (BArch DR1/3616). If the Soviet deputy minister was not convinced of the status of the film he brought to the festival in Leipzig, then the GDR minister was not certain why he issued a prohibition.

Attempts of rebellion on the ship nevertheless took place. For example, a certain VEB [Volkseigener Betrieb, or People-owned Enterprise in the German Democratic Republic] for Water Supplies and Canalization in Berlin, having paid the painful sum of 596 marks for a 16mm copy of the film, appealed against the prohibition, referring to the legal term of the license until 1971. They received the rigid answer that the licence was withdrawn on 11 May 1967 and that their copy was liable to be destroyed (BArch DR1/3616).

Less than ten years passed until the film was cautiously brought to the light of the day for private shows only, not for distribution. Protocol 11/77 states that 'the film is permitted for closed, organized viewing for the Party, mass organizations and educational institutions with immediate effect'. The report was signed by the new head of the department, Dr Kranz.

The practice of 'private showings' was quite familiar in the Soviet space: where and what viewings we tried to get to! Requests for *Ordinary Fascism* after the long prohibition of the film came at once, so that the semi-permission most likely legalized an already existing practice. We have to note that the numerous requests for the film came from very different establishments: VEB DEFA, Studio für Spielfilme (for extracts of frames from Krupp), 1967; Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, Humboldt University Berlin, 1968; Theatre Cottbus (for Brecht's production of *Arturo Ui*), 1969; Theatre Leipzig (same case), 1969; Film Club of the University of Jena, 1970; Hans-Otto Theatre Potsdam, 1971; Polytechnical School Rangsdorf, 1972; Theatre of Friendship, Central Children's and Youth Theatre, and GDR Radio, 1974; ADN News Agency, GDR Law Academy, Maxim Gorki Theatre, German Youth League (Freie Deutsche Jugend), Central Council, Party School of the SED, 1975; and so forth. The requests always stipulated in one or another form 'closed event' or 'closed circle'. Some applications were satisfied, others not; for example the request from German Radio was not met. Some applicants spent over a year and more on the bureaucratic correspondence. Eventually, some ten years later, the screenings of the film were legalized. But the request of the dean of the Hans Otto Theatre Institute, Leipzig, who meticulously specified that the film would be shown in a 'closed [...] internal event' for 18 students and 6 teachers, was dated as late as September 1983 (BArch DR1/3616).

We do not yet know which ideological 'thunderstorm in the beginning of May', to use Tiutchev's phrase, befell the year 1967. Or who – personally –

was the author of the categorical prohibition, or the initiator of the semi-permission. The German Democratic Republic had its own relations to the past. Whatever the unknown 'known reasons' which for years officials of all ranks referred to incognito and generally, it is quite sufficient to open the note (Aktenvermerk 14 May 1979) addressed to the Deputy Minister of Culture for Cinema Affairs, Comrade Pehnert, where Dr Kranz says in the sacramental section 'reasons':

The very subjective attitude to fascism and fascist developments in Germany by M. Romm is without doubt very interesting in artistic and thematic terms, but – in the country which has itself lived through these developments – requires deeper analysis, taking into account the social causes.

[...] due to the subjective observation and the not profound enough representation of the social causes of fascism, the spectator may misinterpret some external manifestations (for example marches), especially in respect of externally similar events under socialism.

The request of the distributor from 2 August 1977 is therefore rejected.

(BArch DR1/3616)

Q.E.D.¹⁷ Only protocol 0247 of 20 October 1989, as the curtain of the regime was coming down, gave the film back its freedom: a quarter of a century later. 'Decision: The film is permitted for release in cinemas of the GDR with immediate effect. Comments: The removal of the limited use clause is due to requests from the population after the renewal of the socialist society of the GDR after October 1989' (BArch DR1/3616). But it was already too late.

Whether the Soviet functionaries kept the film under the same seal of 'confidential' or 'for internal use only', corresponding to the 'poem of an interdiction' (in reference to Tsvetaeva's 'Poem of the end', 1924; BB) remains to be discovered. But Harkenthal knew what he meant. Neither the television version nor the book were permitted – which is what Romm complained about to Brezhnev. However, the regimes of the 'fraternal countries' were maybe similar, but not quite the same.

The already decrepit and cynical Soviet ideology was especially suspicious. The Party bureaucratic *nomenklatura* was worried not so much about the clarity of the Party line, but about its place. And it irrationally searched in all possible ways for Aesop (now Russia responds with arrogance to this approach, and yet Aesop proved itself as one of the rather long-living art forms). At home the film really became the first occasion 'for reflection'.¹⁸

But Russian life, however regulated, never reached the degree of German 'Ordnung'. *Ordinary Fascism* had already been removed from the screens, but whenever I went to Leningrad, I always encountered in the window of a small cinema near the station on the Nevsky Avenue a hand-drawn poster, and was surprised that the film once again coincided with my arrival. Savva Kulish called many years later and said that the director of that cinema had approached him (I was away, Romm and Khaniutin were no longer alive) with the request to hand a memorable sign to the 1,000,000th spectator of *Ordinary Fascism*. It turned out that the film had been screening there for more than twenty years every day...

17. *Quod erat demonstrandum* (that which was to be demonstrated) [BB].

18. 'information for reflection' (*informatsiia k razmyshleniiu*) – a citation from the spy thriller *Seventeen Moments of Spring* [BB].

19. Erich Honecker (1912–94): head of the German Democratic Republic 1971–89, succeeded Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973) [BB].
20. From the letter of the German professor E. Herlizius about the unworthy behaviour of the delegation of Soviet cinematographers in Germany, 15 February 1968. See *Kinematograf ottepli*, p. 396.
21. 'Books have their fates' (Terenziano Mauro) [BB].

The ideological doctrine of the German Democratic Republic was much more 'orthodox' and didactic. Film (albeit a journalistic piece) was not only required to function as an instrument of propaganda, but it had to coincide directly with the textbook of political grammar.

However, the GDR officials too were first of all disturbed by Aesop, as this almost amusing episode proves. In 1968 the leftish youth club 'Comma' invited the film-maker Mark Donskoi and the film *Ordinary Fascism* to Munich for a screening with a subsequent podium discussion. Romm could not go and sent me. I shall not dwell here on the 'instruction' which I received in the Central Committee, that warned us of neo-Nazis (now, by the way, they are more visible than in those days) as Munich's youth in the memorable January 1968 marched 'left, left, left' (to speak with Mayakovsky). Anyway, the screening and discussion happened, and some 'provocative' (as they said in those days) questions were put to us that required unorthodox answers. One such question and answer I remember, because at that moment I decided why I had actually come there. A certain gentleman asked why we had addressed German material, whether we did not have our own experiences to draw on. I answered as diplomatically as I could, but also as truthfully as possible: have you seen any authors who, in the process of creation, do not draw on their own experience? As far as Mark Donskoi was concerned, he partly really was and partly feigned crazy ignorance: the repertoires of his 'performances' were familiar to us all. But a GDR citizen present in the audience, who turned out to be a professor from the Dresden Institute of Philosophy with the Hoffmannesque surname Herlizius, had been so impressed that he wrote an official report to the Central Committee, whence ambassador Abrasimov would transmit it to the secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Comrade Demichev. From this long and eloquent report, translated from German into Russian, I quote here only one phrase, which was underlined by Honecker¹⁹: '...the visitors unanimously recognized that they made this film both about their own conditions and to criticize their own order, the main thing only being the understanding of the metaphors. The film is not historical documentation, it talks about a topic that is relevant everywhere.'²⁰ This episode is almost amusing, because for doing this you were no longer arrested, but they 'worked you over' and deprived you of the right to travel abroad, and so forth.

On the whole, the paradox of cultural relations with a State that monopolizes them is poorly studied and deserves special research. Taking culture on the basis of content as 'propaganda', the State is jealous and picky on its supervision and oppression. Thus, however, the State requires culture to resist and struggle for independence, which, in turn, endows it with public importance. But if the 'indoctrination' of Soviet culture is described more or less systematically, the potential for systematic resistance (including cinema as its most dependent part) remains insufficiently analysed. The amount of published documents (including by Valeri Fomin's group under the aegis of the Institute of Film Art) already gives occasion for further analysis. In fact, culture is not only the sum of all works of art, but also the sum of their destinies. *Habent sua fata libelli*²¹ – said the ancients at a time when cinema did not yet exist.

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Shamara: writing and screening the female body

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Abstract

Shamara, a novella by Svetlana Vasilenko published in 1990, was adapted for the screen by Natal'ia Andreichenko in 1994, based on Vasilenko's own screenplay. This article looks at the ways in which Andreichenko's adaptation of Shamara participates in post-Soviet cinematic conventions by subjecting the female body to sexual violence yet at the same time radically disrupts those conventions. Shamara's most significant challenge to post-Soviet cinema stems from the way it represents female subjectivity and sexuality. If glasnost and early post-Soviet films privilege the male gaze, Andreichenko's film undoes this privilege in that the female body becomes the subject structuring the gaze. As such, the construction of female sexuality in Shamara is largely a matter of self-representation rather than male definition. Moreover, although Shamara's body is the site of violation, in the final analysis, she triumphs over her abuse(rs) in that the violated body becomes the catalyst for enlightenment and change. This article also explores the film's use of the maternal metaphor, which is completely absent from the novella, and the extent to which this deployment clashes with the unconventional portrayal of the female body.

Keywords

female body
female sexuality
violence
Ukrainian cinema
Natal'ia Andreichenko
Svetlana Vasilenko

Shamara, a novella by Svetlana Vasilenko first published in 1990, was adapted for the screen by the Ukrainian director Natal'ia Andreichenko in 1994, based on Vasilenko's own screenplay.¹ Named after the protagonist, Zina Shamarina, *Shamara* is set in an unnamed, relatively remote town with a large convict population. The film recounts the protagonist's efforts to win back her convict husband, Ustin, after he falls in love with Natasha, a young, attractive student and a recent arrival in the town. In discussing Andreichenko's film, critics have focused on a variety of themes, including the protagonist's intense sexual passion. More recently, critical discussion has begun in terms of a closely related theme: the depiction of the female body, which is central to the work of contemporary women writers like Vasilenko.² This article seeks to expand that discussion by looking at the ways in which the representation of the female body in Andreichenko's *Shamara* departs from representations of this body in other post-Soviet films. Although to a certain extent participating in post-Soviet cinematic conventions by subjecting the female body to sexual violence, the film takes an entirely different path by allowing this body a sexual subjectivity and, more significantly in this case, by positing that the body's violation ultimately leads to its regeneration. This article also explores the film's use of the maternal metaphor, which is completely absent from the novella, and the

1. For purposes of clarification, Natal'ia Georgievna Andreichenko who directed *Shamara* (b. 1966) is a different person from Natal'ia Eduardovna Andreichenko, the actress (b. 1956). Andreichenko is a Ukrainian film director and *Shamara* is certainly part of the Ukrainian cinematic tradition. At the same time, this film is a Russian-language adaptation of a novella by a Russian author. Throughout this article I use the term 'post-Soviet' because this is the most accurate way to reflect both of these

aspects. Comparing this film to other post-Soviet films made by Russian directors is not to collapse distinctions; rather, given *Shamara's* Russian-language credentials, it is to claim for it a kind of cinematic biculturalism. I transliterate the director's name as Natal'ia Andreichenko instead of Natalia Andriichenko – from the Russian rather than the Ukrainian – because this is how it appears in the film's credits; I do the same with the names of post-Soviet critics who have written about the film, even though they live in Ukraine, since I have cited their reviews from Russian-language sources.

2. For an analysis of female corporeality and the construction of gender in both the novella and film, see Chernetsky (2007: 118–22), the only such analysis to date.
3. Irina Tsymbal, the non-professional actress who played *Shamara*, was one of two people to receive the Yves Montand Prize for best young actress at the 'Molodist' festival in Kyiv in 1994 (Voitenko 1994). In 1996, Andreichenko received the Dovzhenko State Prize for 'achievement in cinematography' (Rutkovskii 1999).
4. Inexplicably, this subtitle is absent from the text published by Vagrius, where the work is simply subtitled 'novella [povest]'. Kirjanov

extent to which this deployment clashes with the unconventional portrayal of the female body.

Andreichenko's choice to adapt Vasilenko's text is in itself rather striking. With the shift toward a market system, the 'early post-communist period was marked by a prolonged financial crisis throughout the arts and [...] the likes of Tolstaia [...] Erofeev, Pelevin and Petrushevskiaia were generally deprived of the opportunity to see their works on-screen' (Hutchings and Vernitski 2005: 21). Thus, Andreichenko's adaptation of a contemporary non-canonical writer in itself constitutes an exception in, and challenge to, post-Soviet cinema, which tended towards adapting the more commercially viable 'classics', such as the works of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Leskov. Making *Shamara* was an uphill battle for Andreichenko: 'Like many artistic "difficult" films of earlier periods, this film ran into problems with the [...] press and the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture' (Bowdoin College Russian Film Festival website 1996). She also had trouble securing financial support for the film, at one point having to get a job in advertising to make money for her artistic endeavour (Feofanova 1995); additional funding had to be obtained from abroad, making the film a Ukrainian-German co-production. Her gamble to adapt Vasilenko's text paid off. Given its non-commercial nature, *Shamara* played largely at film festivals, such as the International Film Festival in Sochi, the Women's Film Festival in Minsk and the Kyiv International Film Festival 'Molodist'. Despite its relatively low profile, the film garnered recognition by the Ukrainian film community, winning several prizes and drawing positive reviews from critics, one of whom, referring to its showing at the 'Molodist' festival, called it 'one of the most powerful debuts in the full-length film programme' (Voitenko 1994).³

Despite the difficulties associated with making this film, it is not surprising from an artistic point of view that Andreichenko chose to adapt this particular text. Vasilenko's own background in cinema – she studied screenwriting at the Graduate School of Scriptwriters and Film Directors (*Vysshie kursy stsenaristov i rezhisserov*) and wrote the initial version of *Shamara*, which she subsequently reworked, for her entrance exam (Vasilenko 2005: 3–4) – contributes to the relative ease with which her novella lends itself to being filmed. In writing *Shamara*, Vasilenko wanted to find 'a new language of prose [...] at the turn of two genres, cinema and prose [...] I wrote a cross between the novel and the script' (Vasilenko 2005: 9). This intersection is signalled from the very beginning in the subtitle, *A Video Novella (Videopovest')*.⁴ Vasilenko's text is indeed very script-like: it consists of short scenes separated on the page by blank spaces, has terse, fast-paced dialogue, a distinct lack of description and intensely visual episodes.

Moreover, it is perhaps not a stretch to say that Andreichenko was attracted by the female-centred nature of *Shamara*. She herself has categorized her work on this film as part of 'women's cinema [zhenskoe kino]', which she identifies with the ability to intensely explore human emotions in a fresh way: 'I feel that my picture, as well as those of other women directors that I've seen recently, allow us to take a new step into the new reality of feelings' (quoted in Feofanova 1995). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss whether associating women's cinema with

exploring emotion is a regressive rather than progressive gesture, what can be said is that Andreichenko consciously views herself as a female director and her film as part of the tradition of women's cinema (however defined). As such, Andreichenko can be seen, albeit in a much smaller way, as attempting to do in cinema what Vasilenko did in literature in developing a new tradition of women's writing, in which the female body took centre stage.

and Sutcliffe's translation, based on the text in *Zvonkoe imia* (*A Resounding Name*), an earlier Vasilenko anthology, retains the original subtitle. Aside from this difference, the two Russian texts are identical.

Writing the body in New Women's Prose

In the liberalized atmosphere of glasnost and continuing after the fall of the Soviet Union, sexuality and the body emerged from a decades-long silence, moving to the forefront of national consciousness. Yet the new openness in sexual matters had a decidedly male-oriented tone. From beauty contests and pin-ups to the burgeoning sex industry to film and literature, female bodies were on vivid display as objects of male consumption but were markedly absent as subjects. Violence was an integral part of this commodification, such as in the case of pornography and prostitution, industries that flourished during glasnost.

In contrast to such male-centred phenomena, many contemporary Russian women writers presented alternative conceptualizations of female bodies as subjects. Vasilenko's *Shamara* is a key example of what has come to be known, in both Russia and the West, as *novaia zhenskaia proza* – New Women's Prose. Beginning in the late 1980s, Russian women writers appeared on the literary scene in increasingly large numbers, yet they found the male-dominated literary establishment very resistant to publishing their work. In 1990, tired of persistent rejection, a group of writers headed by Vasilenko and Larisa Vaneeva published an anthology of contemporary women's writing titled *Ne pomniashchaia zla* (*She Who Bears No Ill*) and subtitled *novaia zhenskaia proza*. *Shamara* was included in this anthology.

New Women's Prose was not new in the sense of women coming to literature, since a long tradition of women's writing already existed in Russia. Rather, the newness stemmed from its creators' consciousness of gender as a fundamental category of the creative process. The compilers of the anthology identified themselves as women writers creating a female-centred literature ('Ot avtorov' 1990: 3–4). In line with the liberalized tenor of the times, a radical first in New Women's Prose was a conscious and sustained emphasis on the female body. Despite the diversity in themes and styles among its practitioners, the term 'New Women's Prose' has come to designate a particular type of contemporary Russian women's writing characterized by an open and graphic depiction of corporeal phenomena: sex, violence, pregnancy, abortion and disease were some of the bodily acts on display. In texts of New Women's Prose, female bodies were often grotesquely violated; yet many of them were able to overcome their violation through a variety of ways.

Writers of New Women's Prose constituted a radical challenge to Soviet puritanism, which denied the body for both genders, and Soviet (as well as post-Soviet) patriarchy, which constructed female bodies as objects of male consumption. Encouraged by the liberal atmosphere of glasnost, but rejecting its phallogocentric tenor, these writers overturned centuries of literary tradition by creating independent female protagonists who openly,

5. Speaking about glasnost-era films, Lipovskaya (1994: 125) notes a preponderance of 'either rape or the aggressive erotica now in fashion'. On the rise of sexual violence on-screen, see Attwood (1993a: 75–78).
6. For a discussion of the reasons for the rise of sexual violence during glasnost, see Attwood (1993b: 127–30).

guiltlessly and frequently engaged in sexual activity. For the first time in Russian literature, the female body became the textual centre of gravity.

Like literature, cinema opened up to portrayals of the body during glasnost. However, literature and cinema followed divergent paths in terms of this representation; not unrelatedly, the two spheres also diverged in terms of women's participation.

The body in glasnost and early post-Soviet cinema

Whereas depicting sex on-screen was unthinkable for most of the Soviet period, Vasilii Pichul's *Little Vera* (*Malen'kaia Vera*), released in 1988, caused a sensation by being the first Soviet film to contain scenes of sexual activity. Other film-makers readily followed suit, with 'the sex act [becoming] a virtually obligatory feature of Soviet films in the era of perestroika' (Attwood 1993a: 64). Beginning with glasnost, female bodies could regularly engage in sex on-screen; yet this freedom did not result in genuine sexual liberation. Unlike literature, where a multitude of women writers appeared during glasnost, cinema, particularly in terms of directors, largely remained a male-dominated sphere, with Kira Muratova and a few others constituting important exceptions. Even more significant than the predominance of male film-makers was the fact that, despite the gradual reassessment of gender roles in the glasnost and post-Soviet periods, the depiction of sexuality far outstripped the acquisition of gender consciousness.

One graphic example of this outlook was the marked rise in sexual violence in glasnost and early post-Soviet films, with rape becoming a frequently depicted act.⁵ In part, this was a reflection of the rise of sexual violence in society during glasnost and the post-Soviet period, coupled with the sense that, in the liberalized atmosphere, it was now permissible to depict this violence on-screen. To a certain extent, this also evidenced a cultural ideology of positing women as symbolic of the nation, so that 'anger towards the Soviet state was expressed on film by violence against the women who had come to represent it, a violence generally depicted in sexual terms' (Attwood 1993b: 128). This also may have been motivated by the choices made by individual directors.⁶ The variety of reasons notwithstanding, glasnost and early post-Soviet cinema witnessed an overwhelming acceptance of violence and a frequent lack of distinction between violence and sexuality: instances of rape on the glasnost and early post-Soviet screen were often presented as acceptably aggressive sexual activity.

Such portrayals occur in two well-known adaptations of a classic Russian text, Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (*Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda*, 1989): Roman Balaian's eponymous glasnost-era version and, to a lesser extent, Valerii Todorovskii's post-Soviet *Moscow Nights* (*Podmoskovnye vechera*, 1994), with the international release title *Katya Ismailova*. In Balaian's film, brute force underlies Sergei and Katia's relationship, emphasized by the beating he pretends to give her as part of their sexual escapades. Their relationship begins with Sergei forcing himself on Katia despite her protestations, an encounter that Katia subsequently comes to enjoy immensely, evidenced by her smiles and pleasurable moaning. Even in an encounter where 'there is no hint of rape', Katia nevertheless

enjoys being overpowered and objectified: Katia and Sergei's coupling occurs 'in a barn, in which Katerina takes her pleasure in being sodomized like a cow' (Lawton 2002: 267). In *Katya Ismailova*, their first meeting is far less brutal than in Balaian's film. Nevertheless, Sergei applies a good deal of force to the endeavour, almost pushing Katia through a window frame as she attempts to hang on to it, the subsequent close-up of her face entangled in her black net-like sweater, which is symbolic of her entrapment. Soon, however, she begins to moan in extreme pleasure.⁷ Films such as *Katya Ismailova* and especially *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* underscore that, although female protagonists in glasnost and early post-Soviet cinema had and enjoyed sex, this sexuality was very often tied to their violation and domination.

Female bodies were not only violated through physical abuse but also denied access to self-representation. In her analysis of Hollywood cinema, Laura Mulvey (1999: 63) maintains that '[t]raditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen'. With some exceptions, glasnost and early post-Soviet films proceeded from a male point of view in that the majority of both film-makers and protagonists were men, a context in which female bodies functioned as objects of male consumption and titillation:

What feminist film theorists have said of dominant Hollywood cinema can be applied equally to [...] many [films] of the late *perestroika* era. The camera represents the eyes of the male spectator, for whom the woman is the object of 'the gaze', of sexual pleasure in looking. Women in the audience have little choice but to identify with this male objectification of woman.

(Attwood 1993b: 119)

This objectification continued into the post-Soviet period, as for example in Todorovskii's *Katya Ismailova*, which shows Katia typing 'completely naked, as Sergei walks around her [...] He is naked only to the waist; we are allowed to gaze only at her as an object of sexual pleasure for the male character, the viewer, and camera operator' (Knox-Voina 2002: 116).

Although both Balaian's and Todorovskii's films are 'mainstream' whereas *Shamara* is more of an 'art film', making comparisons between them nevertheless seems justified. All three are roughly contemporaneous adaptations of Russian literary works that, crucially, emphasize the theme of female sexuality. Arguably, comparisons can also be made with the work of Kira Muratova, the most well-known post-Soviet female director, whose films often feature female protagonists and fit squarely into the 'art house' category. Her films, which she both directs and for which she writes or co-writes some of the screenplays, depict strong female protagonists objectified neither by the male characters nor by the camera. In *Enthusiasms* (*Uvlechen'ia*, 1994), the camera often assumes the point of view of Lilia (played by Renata Litvinova), for example through her various monologues: talking at the seaside about the boy who hangs himself, she speaks directly to the viewers; as she soliloquizes about the 'peak of beauty [pik krasoty]', the camera foregrounds her in

7. In contrast, Knox-Voina interprets this scene as being far more vicious: 'During this long scene, which would certainly be termed rape by western standards, the camera zooms in on her almost inhuman, terrorized face, focusing on her wild dilated eyes and gaping mouth. She stares back at us through the black net of the sweater in which she is caught like a trapped animal' (Knox-Voina 2002: 115).

the centre of the shot as it follows her pacing back and forth. *Asthenic Syndrome* (*Astenicheskii sindrom*, 1989) reverses traditional representations of the female body. Whereas nudes in film, as in painting, tend to be overwhelmingly female, here both female and male bodies appear in full frontal nudity, as the camera dwells on them in a succession of shots at the party into which Nikolai stumbles at his sister's apartment where the participants are being arranged into a sculpture about love. Furthermore, in the initial film-within-a-film section, the camera showcases Natasha's drunk male companion undressing and standing naked while being watched by a female neighbour, the male body now serving as the object of the female gaze. Yet despite the body's presence in *Asthenic Syndrome*, it is not the focus of the film, remaining peripheral to a concern with psychic and societal malaise, 'the psychological and physical syndrome from which both [Natasha and Nikolai] suffer' (Taubman 2005: 46); *Enthusiasms*, which explores the characters' various obsessions, is even less concerned with the female body. For this reason, a comparison of Muratova and Andreichenko, while productive in terms of visual language, camera techniques and the use of music, to name a few, ultimately works less well in discussing bodily representation.

***Shamara*: subjectivity, sexuality and violence**

While its director, writer and protagonist are all women, *Shamara*'s most significant challenge to post-Soviet cinema stems from the way it represents female subjectivity and sexuality. If glasnost and early post-Soviet films resemble Hollywood cinema in their privileging of the male gaze, *Shamara*, like Muratova's work, undoes this privilege in that the camera assumes the female protagonist's point of view. This authority is manifest



Figure 1: Still from *Shamara*. From the author's collection.

in the multitude of shots of Shamara in the act of looking, most prominently underscored in the extended rain episode. The scene is preceded by the word 'Rain [Dozhd]' appearing on an otherwise empty screen, one of only two instances in the film in which this technique is used. The first shot of the rain appears as Shamara looks at the downpour through the open doorway of a theatre with her back to the viewers, as the camera dwells on this shot. A play is being staged in the theatre, part of which is depicted on-screen. Yet after Shamara walks out to look at the rain, lines from the play are heard, but the performance itself is not shown because the person whose point of view the camera represents is no longer watching. Shamara then runs through the rain-soaked street as the camera alternates between shots of her and objects in her field of vision: a wall of water, playing children and passing cars.

In Andreichenko's *Shamara*, the female body is not the object of the male gaze but rather a subject structuring the gaze. As such, the construction of female sexuality in *Shamara* is largely a matter of self-representation rather than male definition. There are no sex scenes in the novella and, significantly in the post-Soviet context, the film also does not insist on any. Sexuality forms the core of Shamara's being, yet she does not function to titillate the male characters and viewers. She is the object of neither Ustin's nor the camera's gaze. She is a sexual subject and, as such, aggressively pursues Ustin when he appears to lose interest. Subverting the traditional association of women with passivity and purity, *Shamara* exhibits French feminism's notion of *jouissance* – unbounded female sexual pleasure.

To some extent, Andreichenko's film remains more muted than Vasilenko's novella with regard to Shamara's sexuality. In the novella Shamara's frustration, provoked by Ustin's preoccupation with Natasha, manifests itself in a graphic articulation of her own desire: she screams, 'I want a man! [Ia khochu muzhika!!!]' three times, followed by another three-time repetition of 'I want one! [Ia khochu!]' and then by her statement to Ustin, 'I want you! I want you! [Ia tebia khochu! Ia tebia khochu!]' (26, 151).⁸ In contrast, in the film, Shamara says, 'I love you! I can't live without you! I'll die without you! [Ia liubliu tebia! Ia ne mogu bez tebia! Ia umru bez tebia!]' – a less sexually explicit, and more clichéd, articulation of desire. Given the freedom of sexual expression in the post-Soviet period, it is surprising that Vasilenko chose to be more subtle in the screenplay. This subtlety is balanced, however, since the film contains what could be termed a simulated orgasm scene. The camera follows Shamara's slowly moving body in the dark, hunched over on all fours and then in a kind of sitting position, while a woman's heavy breathing, heard off-screen, turns into a moan that rises and falls off in a satisfied exhalation as the camera pauses on Shamara lying, spent, on the floor. Significantly, as this scene occurs in the all-female space of the dorm room, Shamara's sexual display does not involve men, although she does go in search of Ustin in the next scene. Given Shamara's obsessive pursuit of a man, it is problematic to argue that she is a strong female character. However, she is at least somewhat redeemed in that, while she is hell-bent on winning back Ustin, she also seeks to satisfy her own sexual needs, which she does not subordinate or sacrifice to his.

8. Here and elsewhere, when citing Vasilenko's novella, I give only page numbers rather than the full citation with author's name and year of publication; the two sets of page numbers refer to the English translation and Russian original, respectively. In regard to the film, in cases where the dialogue is taken directly from the novella, I rely on Kirjanov and Sutcliffe's translation and give the page numbers for both the English and Russian in the references. Where no page numbers are indicated, the screenplay differs from the novella and the translation is mine.

9. These lines are on p. 129 of the Russian original and p. 3 of the English translation.
10. Not only do sex and violence remain inseparable but, in the film, this combination is intensified by disease: the word 'Cholera [Kholera]' appears on-screen after the initial appearance of the tanks, and the camera cuts to a shot of an island where children are quarantined. *Shamara* was filmed in Mykolaiv, a city that suffered several cholera outbreaks, including in the early 1990s (Chernetsky 2007: 120). While an island also appears in Vasilenko's novella, it bears no traces of disease and the children are entirely absent.
11. She eventually does turn Ustin in to the authorities, although it is not clear whether it is for the initial rape or for some other offence.

Being a sexual subject, however, does not prevent the body from being subjected to all manner of violation and abuse. In both the novella and the film, the violence manifests itself in a hierarchical arrangement. At the top is the Soviet state, the tanks a sign of its vast military power. Below are officers like Maks, who takes grotesque pleasure in inflicting pain on those under him, like Ustin, who in turn victimizes Shamara. Shamara herself exhibits a propensity toward violence, hurling a cart with heavy metal spools at Natasha. Thus, both male and female bodies inflict and suffer abuse, yet female bodies bear the brunt of the violence.

The most prevalent type of violence in the film and the novella is sexual, with female bodies inscribed with this combination of violence and sex. An escapee from a mental asylum – referred to as a 'psycho [man'iak]' in the novella – terrorizes the town's women to avenge his fiancée's sexual betrayal and nearly kills Shamara. Shamara's and Natasha's bodies function as objects of violent sexual exchanges: Shamara is forced to sleep with Maks to save Ustin; Ustin agrees to temporarily hand Natasha over to the psycho in Andreichenko's version. Yet unlike in other post-Soviet films, the association of violence and sex is not merely a reflection of social phenomena or a metaphor for totalitarian oppression. Rather, this brutality is motivated by the requirements of *Shamara's* fictional universe, a world in which threats and violence are always and everywhere close to the skin. Drawing on the novella, Andreichenko establishes the connection between violence and sexuality in the opening image of the film: approaching tanks with long, rigidly pointing guns that begin 'dancing' in circles. Symbols of warfare and state violence, the tanks simultaneously represent 'something more modern – a tank with its gun as an embodiment of brute male strength, of something phallic' (Trimbach 1996: 145). The inextricability of sex and violence is highlighted in the entire opening sequence, as shots of the tanks, themselves both violent and phallic, alternate with sexual imagery and sounds. As the tanks begin swimming in sensuously golden water, a woman's voice seductively says off-screen, 'The air there is like a golden scarf [...] Tender-hot to the lips [Kak zolotoi platok tam vozdukh [...]] On dlia gub – nezhno-goriach'.⁹ Shamara then appears for the first time in a close-up, gliding a hand across her hot face, the initial appearance of a sexual body coinciding with the suggestion of physical threat. The threat is actualized when a tank begins swimming after Shamara, to the sound of off-screen female flirtatious laughter and deep breathing.¹⁰

Where *Shamara* does resemble other post-Soviet films in conflating sex and violence is in its depiction of the protagonist's relationship with her husband. A grateful Ustin marries Shamara after she, for reasons that defy explanation, does not report him and his friends to the police for gang-raping her.¹¹ Becoming enraged at Shamara's attempts to win him back, Ustin rapes her a second time in a scene that epitomizes the intersection of sex and violence. In the novella, Ustin marches Shamara into the forest 'as if he were taking her to her execution [Budto na rassstrel vel]' (26, 151). After a brief but violent struggle, '[h]e caught her, like an animal [...]] He took her roughly, as if he hated her [On poimal ee, kak zver' [...]] Vzial ee grubo, budto nenavidia]' (27–28, 152). Faithful to the novella, the film shows Ustin rushing Shamara through an empty field, pushing, hitting and dragging her by her leg, as the background music grows increasingly

louder. Because her most significant relationship consists of this conflation of sex and violence, Shamara does not recognize the two as mutually exclusive entities. In her eyes, Ustin's animal behaviour is not opposed to sex and love but is rather an integral part of them. His brutality, therefore, can be readily forgiven. In both the film and the novella, the rape scene is split into a 'before' and 'after'; in the novella, the scene is visually divided by a dotted line in the Russian original (152) and a blank space in the English translation (28). Initially, Shamara tries to fight Ustin off; afterwards, she caresses him and tells him she loves him. In the film, her declaration of love is preceded by another grotesque conflation of affection and abuse as she offers, 'Kill me if you want [Khochesh', ubei menia]'.

Shamara's inability to separate sex from violence mirrors the novella's and film's inability to distinguish between the two. Both Vasilenko and Andreichenko present Shamara's willingness to marry Ustin after he rapes her – and to forgive him after he rapes her again – as an (almost) normal occurrence, and neither the novella nor the film questions the protagonist's behaviour. This lack of critical distance between the character's actions and the narrative's point of view results in yet another post-Soviet rape scene that eventually becomes pleasurable for the female body.

Embodied enlightenment

Similarities with other post-Soviet films notwithstanding, *Shamara* drastically departs from them by allowing the female body to transcend its violation. For Vasilenko, '[h]orror and transcendence are inseparable categories' (Goscilo 2000: xiv). Given that sexuality is hopelessly bound up with violation, it cannot serve as a way out; rather, transcendence becomes possible precisely through horrors inflicted on the body. In some sense, *Shamara* can be read as a variation on the traditional Russian theme of suffering being good for the soul. Shamara's suffering ultimately allows for her regeneration, a process directly rooted in the body.

In both the novella and the film, Shamara's violated body becomes a catalyst for enlightenment and change. For Vasilenko, 'violence and physical realia [...] have a double-edged capacity to repel and wreak havoc, on the one hand, and to catalyze a self-confrontation that brings about a more profound moral awareness, on the other' (Goscilo 1996b: 5). On the eve of his and Shamara's scheduled departure from the town, Ustin badly beats Shamara because he does not want to leave Natasha. Shamara's beating by Ustin leads to a radical shift in her outlook. In the novella, she staggers into her good-bye party with 'her beautiful face, now beaten and bloody [...] Shamara's eyes, always triumphant and crazy, now full of intelligence and pain, immense all-human intelligence and immense pain. It was just an instant, like an exhalation [svoe krasivoe, teper' izbitoe v krov' litso [...] vseгда pobeditel'nye i shalye glaza Shamary byli teper' polny uma i boli, ogromnogo vsechelovecheskogo uma i ogromnoi boli. To byl odin mig, kak vydokh]' (54, 177).¹² Shamara's eyes reflect the change from a wild woman to one made immeasurably wiser by an experience of profound pain. The moment is a sudden epiphany, which allows Shamara to confront the truth about her husband. As her friends demand to know who beat her, '[s]uddenly Shamara looked straight into her own heart and breathed out: Ustin [V samoe serdtse vdrug Shamara posmotrela,

12. I have slightly altered the English translation in this quote. In Kirjanov and Sutcliffe's translation, 'vsechelovecheskogo uma' is rendered as 'human intelligence' (54; my emphasis), which does not fully capture the meaning of the original. A more accurate, if less elegant, translation is 'all-human' or 'universal'.

13. For a thorough discussion of this phenomenon, see Goscilo (1996a: 95–104). Although Goscilo focuses on writers other than Vasilenko, the strategy is, of course, not limited to them.

vydokhnula: Ustin]’ (55, 178). Whereas Shamara did not identify Ustin to the authorities after the gang rape, she now names him as the person responsible for hurting her, finding the strength to break free of him from deep within herself. Although she still loves Ustin and vacillates about her decision, she says that Natasha can now have him (56, 179).

Vasilenko’s screenplay differs from her novella in that Shamara never directly names Ustin as her attacker although, given that she goes looking for him and in the next scene is carried into the party with her face covered in blood, there is a strong suggestion that Ustin is indeed the culprit. Otherwise, the film remains faithful to the novella, with Andreichenko performing the difficult task of presenting Shamara’s complex transformation on-screen. Andreichenko emphasizes Shamara’s inner turmoil through an extended close-up of her battered face as she lies on her bed, muttering and writhing in agony, the sound of her friends’ crying merging with music that grows increasingly louder. A succession of contrasting shots renders the change in Shamara. The camera cuts from a close-up of the writhing Shamara to an extended shot of her friend, Raia, and then cuts back to Shamara, who calmly opens her eyes, looks around, and tells Natasha that Ustin is now hers. The final shot is a close-up of Shamara in profile, blood and bruises on full display, as she tells Natasha, ‘Take care of him [Beregi ego]’, and closes her eyes.

In positing the violated body as the path to transcendence, Vasilenko’s novella makes creative use of the narrative of Christ’s Passion. Critics have noted that some writers of New Women’s Prose employ the strategy of ‘regendered Passion’, whereby they portray their female protagonists as Christ figures, specifically through emphasizing bodily violation: ‘by crossing gender boundaries in their appropriation of Christ’s crucified flesh as precedent and homologue, they culturally redefine the possibilities for inscribing women’s bodies’ (Goscilo 1996a: 104).¹³ By analogizing Shamara’s suffering with Christ’s, Vasilenko replays the Passion with an all-female cast, writing women into an essentially all-male narrative.

The association with Christ through extreme bodily suffering is amplified by the religious overtones in the novella. Shamara’s eyes are full of ‘immense *all-human* intelligence’ (my emphasis), thus universalizing the experience. Moreover, her lamentation is a regendered echo of Christ’s lament on the cross. Although she subsequently admits that this is a performance, her cry of ‘Mama, dearest! [...] Why did you leave me, why did you abandon your very own little girl, Mama! [Mamochka moia rodnaia [...] Zachem ty ostavila menia, zachem ty pokinula dochechku svoiu, mamochka!]’ (55, 179) echoes ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ Whereas Christ the man calls out to God the Father, here the female protagonist calls out to her mother. In re-gendering the Passion, Vasilenko reweighs the terms – physical and spiritual – on which it is based. In Christ’s Passion, the spiritual dimension carries much more weight than the physical: the key element is not the crucified flesh, but rather what it symbolizes. In contrast, it is precisely the abused body that Vasilenko foregrounds in *Shamara*: although Shamara may ultimately be ‘resurrected’ through violence, it is the violence itself, graphically manifested on her body, that remains the focus of this episode.



Figure 2: Still from *Shamara*. From the author's collection.

In the film, the Christ analogy is significantly more muted. In part, this is due to changes in the screenplay in which Shamara does not paraphrase Christ's lament. Partially, however, this may be due to the difficulty of depicting the acquisition of an 'immense all-human intelligence' without recourse to direct statements by the narrator about how this acquisition came about. Nevertheless, Andreichenko relies on what is arguably Christ-like imagery in depicting the post-beating Shamara as a bloodied figure writhing in pain. Although she is lying on her bed, the camera angle makes it appear as though she is in a more upright position, fastened to the mattress, reminiscent of Christ's pose on the cross. Through the sustained focus on Shamara's writhing form and close-ups of her bloody face, Andreichenko foregrounds the bodily aspect of this suffering and the femaleness of this body.

While the novella and the film emphasize the violated female body as a catalyst for change, they remain ambiguous about the extent of this change. Shamara ultimately decides to leave town without Ustin, yet she lacks a clear plan, thereby effecting an 'escape into an unknown that may prove merely another version of the unendurable' (Goscilo 2000: xvii). In the film, Shamara tells her friend, the hermaphrodite Lera, that she will go 'first into quarantine [snachala v karantin]', i.e. to the cholera island. Not only is her plan vague, but it entails entering a disease zone. However, her use of *snachala* underscores that she is only going to the island temporarily. More significantly, despite its association with cholera, the island proves to be a warm and welcoming environment where quarantined children play and read fairy tales and where the only genuinely loving scene between Ustin and Shamara takes place. Reachable only via a river, the island is set apart from the town by both distance and the quarantine, and serves as

'the link to the greater open space of the country beyond the town' (Chernetsky 2007: 120). In this way, the island represents freedom from the authorities: it is there that Ustin seeks refuge from Maks and Shamara alights to escape the tank that chases her in the opening scene. Shamara's journey to the island is thus a journey toward the freedom she so desperately seeks. As she stands on the dock with Lera, she refers to her leaving as 'freedom [svoboda]'. In the novella, in which the island does not figure, she nevertheless tells Lera she is going to a place '[w]here there are no bosses [Gde nachal'nikov net]' (57, 180). Her continual assertions of the desire for freedom strongly resonate in a world in which a vast percentage of the population are either actual convicts or metaphorical prisoners. Despite everything she has suffered, Shamara demonstrates a steadfast resolve to live life on her own terms. Unlike Katia Izmailova, Shamara is a female body that does not succumb to but rather, at least potentially, finds a way out of its confinement.

One of the film's final scenes constitutes a variation on foregrounding the female body. As Shamara leaves, she is watched from the dock by the hermaphrodite Lera, an admittedly unique example of alternative bodies emerging in the post-Soviet landscape. As a hermaphrodite, Lera is 'situated in his/her own, individual space beyond the gender dynamic' (Chernetsky 2007: 121). Andreichenko emphasizes Lera's gender uncertainty through the long hair, thinness of frame and generally more 'feminine' features of the actor playing this role. In both the novella and film, Lera attempts to resolve the gender dilemma in favour of masculinity, assuring Shamara that s/he will soon have an operation to become fully male. In retaining Lera's ambiguously gendered status, both the novella and film undercut this assertion of masculinity. The film goes even further in positing Lera's body as more female than male. As Shamara sails away, the camera cuts to a full-length shot of Lera wearing Shamara's dress, and a crew member remarks, 'That guy changed clothes and turned into you! [Von paren' v tebia pereodelsia!]'. In one sense, the gesture is Lera's way of paying tribute to the woman s/he loves. In another sense, in line with the woman-centred universe of *Shamara*, the shot of an already ambiguously gendered person wearing a dress is the film's way of privileging, if not a wholly female body, then at least a body that leans that way.

The (metaphorically) maternal body

A key difference between the film and novella is the treatment of another type of bodily configuration – the maternal body – that is absent from the novella but present as a metaphor in the film. Whereas Russian literature and culture overwhelmingly conflate womanhood with motherhood, Vasilenko's novella posits female bodies that are not synonymous with maternal bodies. None of the female characters have children, and Shamara has an abortion after becoming pregnant from her encounter with Maks. Without access to any medical help, she performs the enormously bloody procedure herself, and her proclamation in Party-speak – 'A Soviet woman is not afraid of abortions! Abortions make a Soviet woman even more beautiful! [Sovetskaia zhenshchina abortov ne boitsia! Sovetskaia zhenshchina ot abortov stanovitsia eshche krashe!]' (53, 176) – sounds a note of pathetic bravado in a desperate situation. To be sure, this is not a

conscious rejection of motherhood, as Shamara's actions are motivated by her hatred of Maks and the fear that Ustin will discover that they slept together. Nevertheless, by presenting this episode, the novella depicts a female body that remains free from maternal inscriptions.

In contrast, the cinematic version of *Shamara* displays a focus on the maternal that the novella manifestly lacks. The film omits the abortion episode entirely, depicting Shamara's pregnancy as ending in a miscarriage caused by Ustin's beating. Writhing in pain, Shamara says, 'When you said goodbye, you went after my little baby [Ty, proshchaia's, shel na moe ditiatko]'. This depiction removes Shamara's agency: she becomes the passive victim, not the initiator, of the pregnancy's termination. Moreover, judging by her use of the endearment *ditiatko*, she most likely did not want the termination in the first place. Most significantly, the film posits Shamara as a metaphorically maternal body by associating her with the children on the cholera island. Andreichenko establishes this association both at the beginning and end of the film. In the opening sequence, Shamara comes upon the children as she swims away from the tanks towards the island and masses of children are running on the same island, to which Shamara is headed, as the film ends.

To a large extent, this showcasing of maternity can be read as a regressive manoeuvre that collapses the distinction between womanhood and motherhood. Nevertheless, the film stops short of incarcerating female bodies in the maternal straitjacket. Shamara may be associated with children, but they are not central to her existence. Moreover, her motherhood is metaphoric, not real, and its use, while problematic, potentially allows 'motherhood' to acquire meanings aside from the biological.¹⁴ In this more generous reading, the use of the maternal metaphor highlights Shamara's capacity for self-regeneration: rather than giving birth, she is reborn as she sails off into what will arguably be a new existence. Furthermore, whereas standard Soviet and post-Soviet constructions of maternity hinge on asexuality, Shamara's metaphoric maternity does not preclude the pursuit of sexual pleasure: she remains a sexual body through and through.

Conclusion

Like the novella on which it is based, *Shamara* is a film that resists easy categorization. On the one hand, it resembles other post-Soviet films in its conflation of sex and rape and, additionally, it insists on metaphoric maternity, stopping just short of insisting that a female body is the equivalent of a maternal body. At the same time, Andreichenko's film radically departs from other post-Soviet films by asserting the female body as a sexual subject and emphasizing that this body is capable of overcoming its violation. In its refusal to be pinned down, *Shamara*, both film and novella, is an example of a (not wholly unproblematic) alternative to masculine conceptions of female embodiment.

Andreichenko's film contributes to the establishment of a female presence in early post-Soviet cinema. Although *Shamara* is not a widely known film, the fact that Andreichenko made it – and audiences watched it – suggests at least some shift in post-Soviet gender consciousness. *Shamara* presents a female protagonist whose point of view structures the narrative,

14. In their texts, French feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray employ 'motherhood' in its metaphoric capacity as a primary strategy of resignification. The move to abstract 'mother' from social and biological role functions is an attempt to conceptualize 'mother' not – or at least not necessarily – as a person who has children, but rather as a set of qualities, or a particular mode of being. Crucially, 'motherhood' becomes a metaphor for women's creativity in literature, art, philosophy, theory, etc. Although Cixous and Irigaray assert this strategy as a way to undo phallogocentric constructions of femininity, they have been much criticized for their too-unproblematic linkage of 'woman' with 'mother'. Vasilenko herself relies on the strategy of maternal metaphor in her novel *Durochka* (*Little Fool*), in which the protagonist's giving birth to a new sun (as in *solntse*) saves the world from destruction.

whose sexuality is neither domesticated through marriage and motherhood nor leads to death, and whose independence is evident in her rejection of a brutal relationship and the desire to live life on her own terms. Over a decade after the release of Andreichenko's film, post-Soviet cinema has yet to follow its lead. Yet *Shamara* suggests that a new language of the female body is possible, even if it may be a very long time in coming.

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‘Nature’, illusion and excess in Sokurov’s *Mother and Son*

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Abstract

Aleksandr Sokurov’s Mother and Son (1997) presents a highly allusive pictorialized vision of landscape, one highly derivative of the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. But the film’s denaturalizing of nature goes even further than this, mobilizing peripheral space, chance, soundtrack/picture disjunction and cinematic excess – all traces of the ‘Sokurovian unconscious’, a puckish counter-text working to subvert the work’s received elegiac mood.

Keywords

Russian cinema
Sokurov
death
excess
nature
C.D. Friedrich

Sokurov’s portrayal of nature is unlike anything that has ever been shown on the screen. Because the author is neither a writer nor a composer, he resorts to cinematic techniques to create this flowing musical landscape, this picture of eternal nature that is indifferent to man. The world depicted on the screen is so strange and magnificent that you wonder: either man hasn’t yet arrived, and, therefore, hasn’t managed to ruin anything, or he has left it once and for all.

(Agisheva 1997: 12)

I destroy real nature and create my own.

(Aleksandr Sokurov, quoted in Schrader 1997: 23)

Representations of the natural world had formed a significant aspect of Aleksandr Sokurov’s cinema since his debut feature, *The Lonely Voice of Man* (*Odinokii golos cheloveka*, 1978, based on the Andrei Platonov short stories ‘The Potudan River’ and ‘The Origin of a Master’) and first documentary *Maria* (Part 1: 1978, Part 2: 1987), which dealt with provincial life. This theme added to the early, misguided (and to some extent, enduring) critical reception of Sokurov as ‘the heir to Tarkovsky’, the dissident auteur who built an industry on inspiring, ‘positive’ depictions of nature.¹ But by his late 1980s films *Days of Eclipse* (*Dni zatmneniia*, 1988) and *Save and Protect* (*Spasi i sokhrani*, 1989), Sokurov began to more boldly foreground his increasingly ‘estranged’, non-Tarkovskian representation of nature; this approach found its crescendo in *Mother and Son* (*Mat’ i syn*, 1997).

The film’s reception and international acclaim (it was the first of Sokurov’s works to get commercial distribution in the United States) came about in spite of difficult subject matter (the anguished death of a family member), characters lacking in psychological depth and its director’s notoriously sluggish (to some, soporific) pacing. Critics for and against the film uniformly cited two things: its unflinching portrait of a dying person’s decline and its astonishingly beautiful depiction of an ‘unspoiled’ natural world.

1. As Johnson and Petrie note: ‘The whole “live” physical landscape forms a highly positive cluster of imagery in Tarkovsky’s films, and the absence of natural elements is always marked as negative. [...] In *Solaris*, *Mirror*, and *Stalker*, luxuriant, often undulating water weeds, grass, bushes, and trees fill the screen with rich tonalities of saturated, mostly green, color’ (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 211). Upon closer examination, the two directors’ vision of the natural world differs sharply. Totaro singles out their most salient contrast: ‘The nature is beautiful and majestic, yet eerily estranged through Sokurov’s extreme stylization. [...] Where Tarkovsky in *Solaris* gives earthly qualities to the planet *Solaris*, Sokurov makes nature feel alien’ (Totaro 1998).

As I argue throughout this essay, this estrangement of nature (as opposed to Tarkovsky's more 'homelike' depiction), comes about through Sokurov's interventionist ethos, which renders the individual elements of nature subject to manipulation – a technique of landscape painting. Tarkovsky, while hardly a mere awed observer of nature who simply points his camera at a pond, nonetheless represents the natural world in a far less obtrusive manner than Sokurov, who more visibly treats it as a blank canvas upon which to overtly impose his vision.

2. For example, the English musician Nick Cave wrote effusively about his emotional response to the film in a 1998 essay entitled, 'I Wept and Wept, From Start to Finish'. This 'death in the wilderness' reading of the film endures. Alin Tasciyan, reviewing Sokurov's 2003 film *Father and Son* at Cannes, wrote of his earlier work: '*Mother and Son* was set in the embrace of nature. A forest with its solid tree trunks and thousands of leaves dancing in the wind surrounded the holy couple in agony. It breathed out the last breaths of an old woman and transferred the feeling of death to us...' (Tasciyan 2003).
3. Iampolskii, on the other hand, takes that naïve linkage

Many reviewers, in fact, echoed Agisheva's comments cited in the epigraph, to the effect that Sokurov somehow managed to construct a unique, authentic vision of nature both lyrical and true to life; the lovely vistas of trees, mountains and grasslands waving in the wind formed the loveliest, most primeval background for the sad, tender tale of a dying mother and her devoted son, reducing the universe to its essentials, its most basic hallowed truths. Ian Christie's response in *Sight and Sound* typifies this strain of commentary on nature in *Mother and Son*:

This is a pre- or post-Oedipal world, with no father, no conflict, no history, no narrative. The son's actions are sacramental: he offers her food and drink; memories in the form of a photograph album; a final communion with nature...

(Christie 1998: 17)

Such lay opinions, which dominate the initial reviews, web postings and public responses to the film,² do not *ignore* Sokurov's radical stylizations of nature in the film, but they largely excuse them as the director's personal flourish justified by the serious subject of death, whose 'disfigurement' of life Sokurov visually captures.³ In other words, the thinking goes, such a tender, honest, intimate representation of death (qua the real) must correlate with an equally transparent depiction of the natural world; the stylizations (anamorphic distortion, smudged images) serve as a means to get at Sokurov's fundamental, *spiritual* vision of nature. His ability to render the metaphysical in visual terms leads critics to hail Sokurov as a master of transcendental cinema.

This essay proceeds from a different, though not unrelated, assumption. Following W.J.T. Mitchell and other critics of the pictorial representation of nature, I will examine the various ways *Mother and Son's* metaphysically 'truthful' vision – particularly its depiction of landscape – is socially constructed, owing an especially large debt to German Romantic painting. Indeed, *pace* the film's popular reading, its representation of nature counts among the most fabricated, simulacral and *unnaturalistic* in the history of motion pictures. In the course of my argument I touch on a critical though largely unexamined aspect of Sokurov's poetics: his subversive, anti-narrative deployment of cinematic excess – in the form of errors, tricks and peripheral 'counter-narratives' – opposed to, and ultimately destroying, the film's surface meaning.

Nature

In his introduction to *Landscape and Power*, Mitchell dispenses with the naïve view of represented nature voiced by many aforementioned viewers of *Mother and Son*:

Landscape painting is best understood [...] not as the uniquely central medium that gives us access to ways of seeing landscape, but as a representation of something that is already a representation in its own right [...] The simplest way to summarize this point is to note that it makes Kenneth Clark's title, *Landscape into Art*, quite redundant: landscape is already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation.

(Mitchell 1994: 14)

At another point calling it the 'dreamwork of imperialism' (Mitchell 1994: 10), Mitchell foregrounds landscape's entanglement and origin in structures of domination: environmental, colonial, racist, ideological, aesthetic. Or, as noted also by James West in his own discussion of Romantic art (including Caspar David Friedrich, about whom we will have much to say), 'the portrayal of the external environment in art has always been conditioned by both the prevailing technical conventions of representation, and the prevailing philosophical view of the physical world (taking the word "philosophical" in its broadest possible sense)' (West 1994: 12). Shaped by myriad forces far removed from 'nature', landscape's inescapable imbrication with, and expression of, power makes it impossible to sustain a vision of it (whether on canvas, on screen, or laid out before us) as innocent or pristine. That many do precisely this (as evidenced by the strong emotive responses to the fantastically stylized nature in *Mother and Son*) calls for some unravelling; for this, let us take a slight detour from art to the real world.

Within the West's environmentalist community, Mitchell's Marxist-tinged, 'formalist' thinking on nature – that it is not so 'natural' – has not passed without controversy. The recent shift in progressive eco-critical thinking, from a 'Deep Ecology' mystification of nature (as sacred space, best left unsullied by man) to the 'Shallow' view that acknowledges the critical role culture plays in constructing the environment crystallized a growing tendency among scholars to complicate the old wilderness/civilization dichotomy and foreground the dynamic relationship between 'the material nature we inhabit and ideal nature we carry in our heads' (Cronon 1995: 22).

The environmentalist historian William Cronon highlights facets of Romanticism (insofar as it constituted a reaction to modernity and growing industrialization), particularly Kant, Burke and William Gilpin's elaborations on the sublime, as central to the 'Deep Ecology' views of our own era. These were largely premised on figuring the idealized landscape,⁴ far away from the corrupted cities, as an appealing flight from history to a timeless, primeval ecotopia, which compensated both for urban destruction of pristine spaces and the death of God. As remains true in western European views of nature (from which *Mother and Son*'s representational strategies derive), the sublime natural landscape – framed or not – safely provides post-religious culture with a profound sense of metaphysical, transcendent meaning:

Wilderness fulfills the old Romantic project of secularizing Judeo-Christian values so as to make a new cathedral not in some pretty human building but in God's own creation, Nature itself. [...] Those who have no difficulty seeing God as the expression of our human dreams and desires nonetheless have trouble recognizing that in a secular age Nature can offer precisely the same sort of mirror.

(Cronon 1995: 80)

Sokurov is thus presenting a psychologized, aestheticized view of nature inherited from the past, particularly from nineteenth-century Romanticist philosophy and (as we will see) painting. His task, therefore, lies not in the 'transparent' representation of nature and death, but in resolving 'question[s] of art' – he seeks to recreate not the natural world but the ideal mirror in which his audiences will misrecognize a truth, which it is their cultural inheritance to covet, even demand. He in fact constructs a labyrinth of

between the film's theme and its representational approach in a completely different direction: '[T]he fantastical painterliness of the landscape is directly associated with the death of the mother, whom the son carries off into a natural space. *Mother and Son* is the history of a death as a transition from the bodily to the visual, as the emergence of an aesthetic illusion out of the dying process' (Iampolskii 2001: 136).

4. Idealized because the common understanding of landscape as 'a picture representing a view of natural inland scenery' inverts the word's etymological origins. Schama notes that the Dutch *landschap* and Germanic *landschaft*, from which the English 'landscape' derives, originally designated not a natural scene but a 'unit of human occupation' (Schama 1995: 10).

5. At the 1997 Moscow International Film Festival, Sokurov's longtime screenwriter Yuri Arabov emphasized that the script to *Mother and Son* comprised only 27 pages.

funhouse mirrors, whose unreal images viewers invest with substance. Sokurov facilitates this grand project of misdirection first and foremost through the film's plot, by resorting to the most artless, sentimentalized, maudlin and unimpeachable subject, save the death of a child: the death of a parent.

The simplest of stories

Mother and Son tells the simplest of stories; it operates on an archetypal level. An unnamed dying mother (Gudrun Geyer) and her unnamed adult son (Aleksei Ananishnov) spend their final time together at a small stone house in a picturesque forest setting of meadows, nearby cliffs and a large body of water, heard throughout the film but unseen until near the end. She asks to go for a walk; her son carries her across several Edenic landscapes, along some country roads, pausing at a bench, a sparse grove of birch trees, a field of yellow grass. Back at the house, he cares for her, dreading what is to come. Finally he leaves her to go out into the wilderness alone, wanders, deep in thought, through some dark woods, and catches a glimpse of a white schooner far out in the ocean. He thereupon starts to cry and wail, knowing he's lost her. He returns to the house to find her lifeless corpse, which he holds close to him. Through his tears he intones, 'Meet me there, where we agreed. Wait for me. Be patient, my dear... Be patient.' And the film closes.

Sokurov tells this story in his usual *adagio*, through exceedingly long takes; clocking in at 73 minutes, the film contains only 58 shots, with an average length of 1 minute, 15 seconds per shot (three seconds longer than Tarkovsky's highest shot average, Totaro points out). As in *The Second Circle* (Krug *vtoroi*, 1990), the dialogue is sparse,⁵ vague, often ancillary to the imagery, sometimes scarcely audible, for the most part inconsequential, and delivered with minimal affect. Neither Geyer nor Ananishnov are professional actors, though the latter played the protagonist in Sokurov's earlier *Days of Eclipse*. Most of the film takes place outdoors in daylight – a strong contrast to *The Second Circle* – with no indication as to how much time has passed; even indoors the shadows of leaves filter in through bright open windows.

In contrast to *Mother and Son's* (contrivedly) clear-cut narrative, Sokurov unleashes myriad devices, technical (manipulation of image and sound) as well as content-specific, to keenly problematize the simple story just described. These feints and ploys congeal by the film's end into an arch 'Sokurovian subconscious' which – for those looking carefully – exposes a brazenly Romanticist venture to remake, refashion, mock – certainly not just show – the natural world. Furthermore, through a marshalling of chance, peculiarity and error normally confined to the realm of filmic excess (and thus usually discarded from the final work as 'spoiled footage'), Sokurov enacts an ecstatic deconstruction of the diegesis itself.

I have identified three major modes through which the director 'contaminates' his vision of unspoiled nature and unspoiled cinema: cinema, painting and isolation.

1. Cinema

Mother and Son, made by a film-maker steeped in the techniques and doctrines of the silent era, quotes liberally from that and other cinematic traditions.

Totaro, for example, compares the film's many 'distortion' effects (discussed below) to those of 1920s French Impressionist directors such as Abel Gance, Germaine Dulac and Jean Epstein. Most of the interior shots (the 'underworld' house) spring directly from German Expressionism; one image shows a medium close-up of the mother against a featureless wall, with a 'shade' (her own elongated shadow silhouette) splashed across the surface behind her (E.W. Murnau, whom Sokurov admires, produced many similar compositions, particularly in *Nosferatu*).

Another notable quote – it leaps out at the viewer, as if accidentally spliced in – comes from the opening of Alexander Dovzhenko's epic *Earth* (*Zemlia*, 1930): a sea of yellow grass waving beatifically in the wind. Tarkovsky, of course, shot similar images, e.g. the underwater undulating plants in the opening of *Solaris*. The country road along which the son carries the mother strongly resembles the one in which Dovzhenko's hero Vasyl is shot in the middle of his ecstatic dance.

Sokurov also self-quotes: the scenes where Ananishnov crouches down in the middle of a dust storm closely duplicate the opening blizzard shot from *The Second Circle*. The figure of Ananishnov himself also counts as a quote: many scenes in *Days of Eclipse* show this same actor inside another dark house that contrasts sharply with a bright exterior. Finally, the director's weighty style of long takes, as often stated, can be traced to Dreyer, Bresson, Tarkovsky, Ozu, Antonioni and the so-called Transcendental Cinema movement.⁶

Sokurov's camera announces its presence at key moments, as in Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, 1929); for all the natural scenery and authentic tragedy, the director wrenches the viewer back by reminding her she is watching a film. Two of these instances come about through the agency of animals – we might say they highlight the hazards of taking the cinematic apparatus into the great outdoors. In the scene where Ananishnov and Geyer stop to admire the rippling field of grass, a long shot shows them by some birches. As they talk, a barely noticeable movement can be seen in the frame's bottom right-hand corner: an insect, out of focus, briefly crawls along the lens – or rather the distorting panes of glass placed in front of the lens. Far from using another, clean take of the scene, Sokurov adds the accompanying buzzing of insects on the soundtrack. Much later in the film, a bird's-eye view of a misty pine forest is briefly encroached upon by as many as two birds (possibly seagulls), which seem to collide with the camera from the side. For split seconds at a time, their fluttering wings and bodies obscure the frame's left and right extremes, accompanied by a clattering, 'indoor' echo, before they dash away. Such 'unprofessional' technical gaffs threaten to undo the contemplative, elegiac mood of these nature scenes – provided the viewer is in the frame of mind not to discount them.

And yet it seems that precisely this – the cinematic equivalent of shaking you by the shoulders – is what the perfectionist Sokurov achieves. Known for painstakingly constructing his films in the editing room out of largely improvised location footage, he seems to have selected precisely such 'ruined' material out of the hours shot (and carefully scrutinized) to spotlight, not suppress, cinema's very contrivances. We will examine many more instances of such gaffs below.

6. Also worth noting, in *Mother and Son* Sokurov recreates the very production *process* of early cinema. Not only did he craft special lenses, strive for a sepia quality to the images, rely on gesture and expression over words, and construct the visuals and the soundtrack as separate entities, but he went so far as to build a complicated revolving set into a dune, so that he could always access the best natural light through the windows during the interior scenes, an early technique of the silents (Schrader 1997: 23).



Figure 1: *Mother and son resting by some birch trees. From the author's collection.*

Even Sokurov's most perceptive critics (even those who, like Iampolskii, have written of the director's playfully subversive side before) do not mention these cinematic ruptures in *Mother and Son*. Perhaps reputation has the most to do with such responses: Sokurov, the 'heir to Tarkovsky', cannot but produce ponderous, recondite work. I contend that Sokurov is himself a savage (if subtle) satirist, of his own critical reception first and foremost. *Mother and Son* provides one of his best examples, precisely because so many have read it almost as a sort of glorified, 'New Age' nature documentary.

For all of these reasons, and whatever else it may be, *Mother and Son* is no transparent filmic representation of nature, but one which draws richly on the cinematic depictions of the past – as well as, evidently, on the inevitable mistakes that bubble up when shooting on location (excess).

2. Painting

I have stopped pretending that the image onscreen is dimensional. My first goal is that images have to be flat, as well as horizontal. Secondly, it has to be a comprehensive reading of artistic and aesthetic traditions – I'm not shooting a concrete picture of nature, I'm creating it.

(Sokurov in Schrader 1997: 23)

I have deferred enough my discussion of *Mother and Son's* key visual feature, with which many of its reviewers begin: its bizarre, characteristic warping of the filmic image. Sokurov starts by deploying anamorphic lenses to elongate, tilt and otherwise deform bodies and landscapes *mechanically*. He had used such special lens techniques before, in *Save and Protect* and his 1992 film *Stone* (*Kamen'*, 1992). As mentioned, such French Impressionist 'funhouse' distortions of the frame represent a cinematic return of the repressed: much more common in the silent era, they have all but vanished from the mainstream

over the last seventy years (with the exception of sequences motivated by the plot, e.g. a character's use of hallucinogenics). But Sokurov goes further, reviving an old cinematic practice virtually extinct in the digital age: painted glass panes. Placed in front of the camera, these create a further estranging effect, darkening certain areas of the shot, 'misting' others, sometimes creating uneven 'frames' around a tree or mountain.⁷

Iampolskii points out that these deformations of the image produce, among other things, the effect of looking at a flat canvas from an oblique angle (he relates this to seeing a painting in this way, but if anything we could better compare it to sitting too close to the screen at the movies).⁸ Not only does this odd move force us to gaze upon the familiar with new eyes, it can also make visible otherwise latent content, e.g. Hans Holbein the Younger's well-known painting, *The Ambassadors* (1533), whose combination portrait/still life hides a *memento mori* skull in plain sight by representing it as an anamorph which resolves itself only if seen from the side. Sokurov's lenses and glass panes create a similar effect: 'de-realizing' the world they record: 'In real life we cannot gaze at the body "from a corner" and we cannot imagine this body in an anamorphic way [...] Sokurov, however, crafts the reality before the camera as if it were a painting!' (Iampolskii 2001: 131).

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein has pointed out the tendency of critics to describe Sokurov's visuals as paintings, using terms like 'dreamscape', and even referring to his soundtracks as 'soundscapes'. Precisely this quality of his art invests *Mother and Son* with that particular hyper-estrangement we have been discussing; Sokurov's landscapes are uncanny in the direct Freudian sense (he makes nature consolingly homelike and disconcertingly foreign at the same time) because his compelling visions of the natural world come not from the great outdoors, but from museums.⁹

Sokurov has a well-known love and respect for master painters; through an arrangement with the Hermitage Museum he has launched a documentary series devoted to them (he made the first, on Hubert Robert, in 1996). His film *Russian Ark* (*Russkii kovcheg*, 2002) is essentially a single, 90-minute-long tracking shot through the Hermitage, stopping to gaze at several paintings along the way; his short film *Elegy of a Voyage* (*Elegiia dorogi*, 2002) likewise spends much time in Rotterdam's Boijmans-Van Beuningen Museum.

Several 'distorted' shots in *Mother and Son* recall Russian icons, with their levelling of foreground and background onto one flat plane; as mentioned, these compositions (as when Ananishnov and Geyer sit amongst some tall grass) mirror a 'Madonna and child' portrait. The grass blazes a bright gold, seeming to burst out of the frame, dominating the two figures. During the bench scene, a particularly low angle shows Geyer's body against a massive tree trunk in the background. The anamorphic lens makes the trunk's texture stand out like a three-dimensional image, almost seeming to crush the frail elongated mother; this claustrophobic device increases the tension when the sick woman goes into her convulsions of pain.¹⁰

A well-known Renaissance painting makes a cameo in the schooner scene: Pieter Breughel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c.1554–55), widely interpreted as a work about reconciliation with the inevitability and marginality of individual death. The schooner itself duplicates the appearance and direction of Breughel's indifferent galleon, which (as W.H. Auden

7. As Sokurov explained his working methods to Schraer: '...I'm using a couple of simple mirrors, large panes of glass, as well as brush and paint, and then I look into the lens – *You put the glass in front of the lens?* – Yes, in front, and on the side, and behind, placing them on different support structures. It's very hard, very particular, and a long process. I destroy real nature and create my own' (Schraer 1997: 23). For more on Sokurov's manipulation of the frame, see Sedovsky (2001).

8. Iampolskii relates *Mother and Son* to a documentary made at about the same time, *Robert: A Fortunate Life* (1996), in which he films the Enlightenment artist Hubert Robert's paintings obliquely, highlighting, among other things, their 'paintingliness' (Iampolskii 2001: 125–31).

9. Sokurov often brings up painting reverentially in interviews. Galetski catalogues some of the painters whose influence he acknowledges: the nineteenth-century Russian Wanderers [*Peredvizhniki*] school, Vasilii Tropinin, Mikhail Vrubel, Rembrandt, J.M.W. Turner, Andrew Wyeth and various realists.

10. This notable quotation, identifying the mother quite explicitly as a Christ figure, recalls Andrea Mantegna's foreshortened Saviour from *Dead Christ* (after 1466),



Figure 2: *Mother and son among the tall grass*. Courtesy of Iskustvo kino archive.

whose feet seem almost to protrude into the visual field of the contemplator. The art historian Frederick Hartt notes the effect meant to produce 'with the greatest possible intensity the personal meaning for [the viewer] of Christ's sacrificial death' (Hartt 1985: 562). This painting is also referenced, less subtly, in Andrei Zviaginstsev's *The Return Vozvrashchenie*, (2003).

11. Schmied notes: '[T]he Romantic artist [...] no longer looked at his landscape with the eyes of an innocent; he saw in it his inner self' (Schmied 1995: 23). Furthermore, in reading Koerner's catalogue of the broad concerns of German Romanticism, one is struck at how well they apply to Sokurov's film: '[A] heightened sensitivity to the natural world,

described it in his 1938 poem 'Musée des Beaux Art') 'had somewhere to get to and calmly sailed on' despite the tragedy.

As noted, one could devote many more pages to identifying Sokurov's painterly and cinematic allusions; suffice it to say that the film operates largely as an arresting pastiche of moving art masterpieces. One great master, however, casts a longer shadow than any other on this work, both in terms of its visual style and mood of overarching melancholy: if *Mother and Son* is a 'living painting', then it is largely one produced by Caspar David Friedrich.

A reclusive North German landscape artist, Friedrich (1774–1840) painted highly subjective, eerily disorienting vistas of misted mountains, dying trees and figures oddly lost in 'an immense and impersonal world, responsive to no human emotion save sadness' (Hartt 1985: 813). As an early Romantic, he gave visual expression to the ideas of Schelling and Novalis, conferring a psychologically driven symbolism upon nature to unite the spiritual, the cosmic and the personal through intense creative activity. Some even see his landscapes more as a form of gloomy self-portrait: 'The painter should not paint merely what he sees in front of him, but also what he sees within himself [...]. If he sees nothing within, he should not paint what he sees before him' (Koerner 1990: 74).¹¹

Friedrich achieved his idiosyncratic visions through darkened foreground figures contrasted with bright backgrounds; in mysterious 'reversed' portraits of figures contemplating (and cut off from) natural vistas with their backs to the viewer, as in his well-known *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog* (c.1818); and a vertiginous, multi-perspective depiction of visual elements: '[I]t was as if each object brought with it its own space, and the rock in the foreground occupied a different layer of space from that of the tree behind it or the line of mountains on the horizon' (Schmied 1995: 38).

This wilful remaking of the natural world to the extent of alienating it would come to influence Paul Cézanne, Edvard Munch and the Surrealists.

As Borsch-Supan points out, the refashioning of nature reflected both the growing importance of individual expression in art, as well as an increasing unease with man's own place in the natural world:

The [traditional landscape] composition appears to be established by the things themselves and can therefore manifest itself in them. By contrast, in Friedrich's landscapes the compositional figure is presented undisguised as an invented structure imposed on the selected objects. Accordingly, the arrangement of the picture does not reflect an arrangement visible in nature; it is only the artist's invention, and therefore behind Friedrich's pictorial forms there lurks a certain doubt about the harmony of nature as it really is.

(quoted in Schmied 1995: 37)

If the essence of Romanticism, in E.T.A. Hoffman's famous phrase, is 'infinite longing', we can read in Friedrich's work an unfulfilled yearning for God expressed as an estrangement of Creation – to such a degree that more than once his paintings were accidentally hung upside down! As a classically minded contemporary huffed, in Friedrich's landscapes 'nature was actually destroyed' (Schmied 1995: 40).

The archetypal characters in *Mother and Son* go through their sorrows against a profoundly Friedrichesque natural setting; more than merely quote his paintings, Sokurov thrusts his figures within them, moves his camera among them. He brings Friedrich's canvases to uncanny life even as he insists on the image's irreal two-dimensionality.

And yet, the particular painting which more than any other determines the mood of *Mother and Son* does not appear in the film – except, we might say, 'subconsciously' – so obliquely as to both disappear and swallow up Sokurov's picture. *Monk by the Sea* (1808–10) depicts a tiny Capuchin on a strip of beach, dwarfed by an oppressive overcast sky and forbiddingly dark ocean. The canvas inspired dread and thoughts of mortality among its first viewers, awed by its sense of desolation. Yet even in this stripped-down, minimalist representation of nature Friedrich seeks to disorient and undermine any sense of visual stability:

The sea and the dunes are seen from different perspectives: though we seem to be looking down onto the shoreline, the surface of the sea appears to be foreshortened, tipped away from us. The sky occupies still another dimension. Behind a thick bank of clouds lying just above the water a second, more distant wall is built up in bluish tones – as though there were two skies. Shore, sea and sky are incompatible; each requires a different way of seeing, yet they form an inseparable unity.

(Schmied 1995: 64)

The painting forces the viewer to 'make sense' of an image slightly, subtly askew, which, when combined with its sombre subject, produces a piercing unease. All of this resonates with *Mother and Son*, which also asks us to resolve a distorted, subjective view of nature overburdened, disfigured by tragedy.¹² Furthermore, we can understand the roar of pounding surf heard through so much of the film as coming from the cheerless ocean in this painting, a constant aural presence brought to life by Sokurov.

combined with a belief in nature's correspondence to the mind; a passion for the equivocal, the indeterminate, the obscure and the faraway (objects shrouded in fog, a distant fire in the darkness, mountains merging with clouds, etc.); a celebration of subjectivity bordering on solipsism, often coupled with a morbid desire that that self be lost in nature's various infinities; an infatuation with death; ... and a melancholy, sentimental longing or nostalgia which can border on kitsch' (Koerner 1990: 23).

12. In 1997 Locarno Film Festival literature, evidently based on Zero Film's own press releases, Sokurov discusses the influence of painting on *Mother and Son*, noting, '[Friedrich] was the most important. His paintings are simple, deeply poetic, and very emotional.' He singles out *Monk by the Sea* as the film's primary aesthetic inspiration: 'What's most important for me in this painting is its use of shadows and subdued colors, the openness of the composition, and, at the same time, its rigor. The dramatic atmosphere of paintings like that correspond to the mood of my film.' Available at <http://www.pardo.ch/1997/filmprg/f037.html>. Accessed 9 March 2008.

We need not comprehensively catalogue all the Friedrich landscapes and portraits referenced in the film; I will restrict myself to the most thematically important. Numerous shots from within the house show some flowers and a grassy hillside framed by a window in a composition of dark versus bright. More particularly, the image of Ananishnov opening a window to let in light (which sets off the black cross of the sash bars) recalls Friedrich's *Woman at the Window* (1822), his only known interior. Apart from the reversal in gender (setting up a continuity between mother and son), Sokurov references this painting for its obvious religious content (visually equating the spiritual with the natural) and its partial view of a sailing boat, anticipating the son's encounter with the schooner at the film's end. Moreover, this small canvas oddly offsets the woman against her surroundings, almost like a stereoscopic or three-dimensional effect (the figure looks pasted on to the background, an inserted foreign element), which resembles all too well Sokurov's anamorphic refashionings; each portion of the picture requires a different way of seeing.

Another good example of this occurs in a long landscape shot of Ananishnov carrying Geyer along the two-tracked road, which comes at almost precisely the film's halfway point. As the son walks towards the camera with his burden, getting closer and closer, he leaves one zone of focus after another, so that the camera has to constantly adjust its depth of field ('rack focus') to keep the figures sharp. This progressively renders the landscape itself softer and softer, so that the people come to stand out starkly from the surroundings, literally walking out of Eden. Sokurov's use of an anamorphic telephoto lens creates this artificial effect; under such exterior light conditions a wider lens could easily maintain deep focus of the entire scene – if one chose to use it.

Another scene serves as homage to (and to some extent parody of) Friedrich's many 'reversed portraits'. Numerous art historians interpret these figures, painted with their backs to the viewer, as the embodiment of alienated man cut off from nature; they in essence duplicate the posture of the painting's beholder, gazing upon the vistas sprawled before them as detached observers, never entering the world they survey, 'man and nature unreconciled'. The fact that the subjects of *Dawn (Woman Facing the Setting Sun)* (c.1818) and *Wanderer Over a Sea of Fog* wear contemporary clothing seems to reinforce the alienation of man and environment as a specifically modern problem. Others read the natural landscape that the reversed figure contemplates as an allegorical projection of his/her thoughts, which implies the possibility of unity with nature (Schmied 1995: 24–25).

Capitalizing on the advantages of a kinetic medium, Sokurov chooses to play it both ways. During the son's long walk after seeing his mother alive for the last time, he comes upon the train making its usual crossing in the distance. The long shot depicts a meadow of tall grass, the train slowly moving right to left, throwing up a trail of steam, and the figure of Ananishnov, standing in the meadow, facing the viewer. At this point, the classic reading would see the man as *staffage* in 'communion' with the environment, as open to scrutiny as any other element of the scene. But as the train traverses the frame, a curious thing happens: Ananishnov at first resists, but slowly twists his body to follow the engine's progress, even as its arrow



Figure 3: *The train in the distance. From the author's collection.*

'pierces' him right above the heart. This recalls his earlier contention, 'I am a man of the head, not the heart' – the train divides him at the point between the two. By the end of the shot, we have a bizarre hybrid: man caught in some limbo between body and spirit, half in and half out of nature, literally contorting himself to reconcile that contradiction. The train, as an engine of modernity, cuts through the natural world, through the son's heart, pulling him away from a sick mother he can barely bring himself to leave.

The only path to resolving the dilemma and end one's alienation from the natural world, Sokurov shows, leads through the gate of death. He thus duplicates and hints at Friedrich's many paintings of transitional spaces that serve as passages to the next world; the gate in *Cemetery Entrance* (1825), the arch in *Graveyard in the Snow* (1826–27) and similar images find their counterparts in Sokurov's shots of the house entrance, the open windows and the footpath leading to the dark grove. The image of the open door framing the ignited stove imitates Friedrich's penchant for tantalizing, half-obscured glimpses of what lies beyond the gate/arch, as in *Monastery Graveyard in the Snow* (1817–19), which shows a ghostly altar 'on the other side'. Both Friedrich and Sokurov's imagery usually does not lend itself to such easy allegorical readings, however. These highly symbolic landscapes involve ultra-personalized codes of signification, which require a similarly individual response. To call them 'Christian art' over-simplifies their representational complexity and ideological intent. Simply put, they work hard to evoke metaphysical visions, a sense of transcendence or a 'world beyond', without ultimately filling in the outlines of that immaterial, supernatural space. 'Infinite longing' must always miss its object.

The level of complexity these visual depictions attain grows more apparent in a final example of a Friedrich quote: the schooner scene. This takes place very late in the film, when Ananishnov catches sight of the sailing ship in the water and somehow senses that his mother has passed away. As discussed above, Breughel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of*

13. '[Our] gaze is concentrated in the chasm, and the whole of the middle distance is compressed into a single plane. Whether between the narrow strip of grass of the foreground and the plane of the cliffs, or in the yawning space between the cliffs and the open sea – there are no transitions' (Schmied 1995: 82).

Icarus serves as a key inspiration here – which already complicates matters, given that we can read Sokurov's shot of the schooner as a site of contention: Breughel's famous pre-Romantic vision of individual death as marginal vs. Friedrich's less well-known seascape *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* (c.1818), where the subjective experience of death expands to subsume the world.

Friedrich's picture ostensibly depicts a cheerful scene: his honeymoon journey to Rügen with his new wife, Caroline Bommer, in 1818. Again in 'reversed portrait', back to the viewer, he stands and she sits at opposite ends of the canvas, perched on a grassy tree-lined cliff edge overlooking gnarled white bluffs and beyond, a vast expanse of ocean. Two sailboats ride the waves, one nearer but smaller, the other far out to sea but oddly closer-looking. A mysterious third figure, clearly older (he has set his cane aside), half-kneels, half-lies between the newly-weds, evidently examining some grass. Caroline gestures to him, pointing as if to say, 'Careful, don't fall off the precipice'. The work carries many typical Friedrich touches: the figures' dusky, brownish foreground set off against the bright vista; subjects with their backs to the viewer, contemplating the natural scene before them (and us); a general sense of despondency despite the buoyant theme; and a disorienting multi-perspectival depiction of space in which the hostile ocean, pressed by the cliffs, threatens to tip over and spill out of the canvas, while the precarious cliff edge seems eager to suck the figures over and into the abyss.¹³

Clearly, something other than conjugal bliss is going on here. Schmied points out that the young man is dressed for the country, while the others look like city folk. Blues and reds, mirroring the colours of the young man's coat and the his bride's dress, blend in throughout the picture, in the sea, chalk cliffs and sky, certifying both their union to each other and their assimilation into the colour scheme of their natural surroundings (Schmied 1995: 81–82), but something ominous seems woven into the fabric of this picture. And what about the strange old man?

The art historian Jens Christian Jensen first suggested that the male figures represent a double self-portrait – Friedrich split into two opposite halves: young and old, town and countryside, one gazing at the totality of nature, the other focused on a narrow strip of it. Jensen himself interprets the two halves as Friedrich's 'unfamiliar dual role as artist and husband' (cited in Schmied 1995: 81–82). But we could easily add another dual category: the artist erect, in the prime of life versus prostrate, ailing, at death's door. Not unlike Breughel's canvas, then, *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen* conveys a lesson of mortality as a normal, inevitable part of life – even in the happiest times. In short, a painting very much in the *memento mori* tradition.

This a defensible reading chiefly because Friedrich inserts an actual, mammoth *memento mori* as the all-consuming central image (the subject) of this painting – hidden, as in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, in plain sight. While not an anamorph, like that in the earlier work, decoding this cipher does require a different way of seeing.

Some critics have noted that the great expanse in the centre of the canvas, formed by trees and cliffs and filled with ocean, resembles the shape of a heart or hour glass, alluding, respectively, to the couple's consummated love and the awareness of time's passage at a stage of personal transition. Though both those readings undeniably work, I point out that a

Valentine-type representation seems a bit breezy, given Friedrich's sombre oeuvre, while the hour glass is better known as an age-old symbol of death. But in any case, I see something different in that yawning void.

It much resembles an enormous human skull, and not simply in its shape: a rounded cranium formed by the overhanging branches, left eye made of leaves from a wayward branch, its right eye the sailboat, its teeth the white, jagged chalk outcroppings near the bottom edge. Both cheekbones are formed by eroded creases in the cliffs. The skull is made up of all the earthly elements: water, air, fire (as sunlight) and the earth of the chalk cliffs. Friedrich's alter ego (the ailing old man half of the 'double portrait') looks as if he is crawling along the turf, directly into the skull's craggy maw.

The foliage that constitutes its eye would seem to link it to nature's cyclical harmony. It emanates from the exact centre of the canvas, suspended in space, dominating the entire scene to such a degree that it disappears into it, resembling the optical illusion psychologists call a 'reversible figure'. Seeing the skull requires the viewer to shift her gaze such that the same objects take on a different meaning and become parts of a larger whole.¹⁴

How does Sokurov make use of *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*? We can certainly say that invoking arguably Friedrich's most thanatopic landscape at the height of the drama (the onset of the event the son has been dreading throughout the film, his mother's death) immeasurably enhances the emotional power of the schooner scene for those who spot the reference. But it also helps to communicate just how the sight of a ship (a particular kind of ship, in fact an anachronistic schooner) communicates the tragic news to the son. In the most direct sense, he has recognized it for what it is: the right eye of death. Sokurov goes far beyond the mere cultural associations of ships with a journey to the afterlife, dating back at least to ancient Egyptian funerary ritual. He references a particular version of that tradition, western European Romanticism and especially early German Romantic art, and even more particularly, one specific work from one artist out of that tradition.¹⁵

But Sokurov goes yet another step further. Apart from faithfully replicating the dun-brown tones of Friedrich's foreground such that the anamorphic figure of Ananishnov blends into the equally distorted, flattened background (Callois's 'temptation by space'), Sokurov places his camera at a 90-degree angle to Friedrich's perspective; we are now looking on the son, in the place of the painting's young groom, in a medium long shot from his left. We have entered the virtual world of *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*, with a clear view of the 'opposite side' of the scene. From gazing on a 'live canvas' at such an oblique angle, we have plunged into its plane: Sokurov's final marriage of painting and cinema.

As Ananishnov weeps bitter tears, we pick up the spectral, but distinct, sound of a woman singing: she is Caroline Bommer, Friedrich's bride, casually enjoying her holiday and pointing the old man away from the precipice. She sits, in her red dress, where she always has in *Chalk Cliffs of Rügen*, hanging on to a shrub to keep from falling over the edge. We do not see her off-screen – Sokurov has changed the perspective so that she now resides roughly *behind* the viewer – but her ghostly presence remains. She sings a lullaby, oblivious as her husband looks full on the (painted) face of death.

14. In 1837, three years before his death, Friedrich returned to this same composition in water-colour, reworking the scene. He removed the people but left the skull shape more or less intact, though admittedly the sailboat no longer lies precisely where it needs to form the eye, and the overhanging tree leaves no longer touch to form the rounded head. But the shade, the memory of the composition, remains. See Schmied (1995: 37).

15. So much for *Mother and Son*'s long-touted 'universal' depiction of the natural world. In this scene, at least, we can trace it fairly precisely to a place and time – northern Germany, c.1818 – to one man's meditations on mortality during his honeymoon.



Figure 4: *The son mourning his mother's death. From the author's collection.*

3. Isolation

The only sign of human habitation is the moving puff of smoke from a train which occasionally passes by in the far distance. [...] The film is largely unpsychological.

(Finkelstein 2002)

Let us recall Cronon's observation that the Romantic flight *to* wilderness represents a flight *from* civilization, society and history. The most natural of natural places, the truly timeless, sublime landscapes where one might 'see the face of God', were remote, isolated, far from the corrupt urban sphere.

But, as it turns out, the natural setting in which the mother and son enact their drama is neither remote, nor isolated nor, it seems, a wilderness. Several startling passages in the film reveal the pair's 'isolation' to be the product of their own minds.

In the film's climax, the son's solitary rambles fulfil the Romantic understanding of nature as the site of the 'absolute within', where 'the ego objectifies itself' (Schmied 1995: 23–24) a hypertrophy of the notion that 'Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock' (Schama 1995: 7). The grieving, solipsistic son enters a virtual world where the self obliterates nature, rendering it solely into a mirror for his feelings, *all* dreamwork.

Sokurov details the degree of hermetic egocentricity this entails – to the point of farce. At key moments – and quite unbeknownst to his clueless characters – he reminds the viewer that even the greatest suffering, as Auden puts it, 'takes place/While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along'. Sokurov brings that very line to life, in fact, during the course of his own sly deconstruction of the self-obsessed Romantic project. This ultimately allies him in spirit with Breughel's view

in *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (and Auden's comment on it): turn inward all that we may, the outside world never leaves us; the individual has, or should have, practical and moral limits. All this demonstrates that to label Sokurov solely a neo-Romantic falls short of truth.

We get a sense of *Mother and Son's* uncanny view of nature a few minutes into the film, in our first glimpse of the train. We actually do not see the engine itself, only its prodigious steam trail shooting out from behind foliage, as if it were an unseen whale swimming just beneath the surface of the grass, blowing air overhead. A surreal image: one gets the impression of a freakish marriage between animal and machine; the train, modernity's signature metonym, has blended into (and under) the natural landscape. To reinforce this effect, the engine's steam trail disappears mid-frame behind the foliage of a tall tree, as if it just 'dove' deeper into the earth; a Magritte-like vision.

This early optic aberration, coupled with the anamorphic distortion evident from the first frame, alerts us to the film's suspension of conventional ways of seeing – and this relates first and foremost to the son, since he sees the train each time it appears, he spies the schooner, he penetrates the landscapes much more deeply and widely than the debilitated mother. In short, we see this dream world through his subjective vision. Not only subjective, but in the most direct sense unreliable.

The urge to escape civilization (even as he longs ambivalently to return to it) and join a nature he associates with his sick mother leads the son to see only what he wants to see. A train, therefore, gets phantasmagorically morphed into a quasi-natural object through the son's waking dreamwork; the landscape is literally deformed by sadness; and nothing outside of said mental scheme exists. This is the paradigm to keep in mind as we proceed to consider the extent and meaning of mother and son's true isolation.

Firstly, the unhappy couple may not be so alone at all. A relatively brief twelve-second shot comes up as Ananishnov and Geyer set out on their first walk. It shows a pair of houses (these too may be scale models, though some grass does seem to move), set off against a desolate Friedrichesque expanse of fog. They look battered, almost like ruins, and certainly we get no evidence anyone is living there. But nothing tells us they are abandoned either; for one thing, both houses look like the typical wooden residential structures one sees in rural Russia (which do not always appear in the best shape), and they seem intact. They definitively do *not* resemble Friedrich's ruins – half-reclaimed by nature, barely leaving any impression of what they were in life. These homes look habitable: no exposed walls, no sunken roofs, windows in place, humble but tidy. In short, these homes look normal, ordinary and completely serviceable for housing warm bodies. In fact, only Sokurov's anamorphic distortions, dismal colours and oppressive sound of battering wind make them seem abandoned. But even if we accept that those plain cottages are deserted – what exactly are they doing in an isolated wilderness far from the city in any event?¹⁶

Other odd details start to accumulate when Ananishnov is carrying Geyer along the country paths. Again, we can ask why this untouched, primeval 'God's country' is riddled with country paths, trails and wide roads, some of which are double-tracked (made by heavy vehicles). But something else seems amiss. Occasionally the son stops to rest, crouching

16. We can even deduce the profession of the people that lived or may still live in those cottages: quarrying. One shot of white cliffs sporting tufts of vegetation (in anticipation of Friedrich's chalk cliffs?) strongly resembles a worked quarry. Though not made clear by the film, this is part of the same space Ananishnov traverses on his way to the dark grove; Tushinskaya, on the *Isle of Sokurov* website, mentions: 'The huge quarry along which the hero descends, as into the depths of the earth, was filmed in Germany.' Sokurov's 'natural' landscapes are thus patched together, as is the norm for cinema, through a montage of footage from different geographical locations. This means that the dark grove, presented as, in a sense, the most hidden away, overgrown and 'natural' location (and portrayed in the film's longest-lasting take, with sunlight changes in real time) is *part of a worked quarry*.



Figure 5: *The country roads*. From the author's collection.

17. The film's soundtrack is equally suggestive. While sitting in the field of golden grass in the icon-like medium shot, mother and son seem not to notice the sound of others' voices and footsteps all around them. In the finale, as the son mourns over his mother's corpse in their dark chamber, the heavy-booted steps of someone outside the door, as well as of a dog barking, are clearly audible. Yet this too goes unacknowledged by the son.

or sitting on the ground with his mother still in his arms. The curious element: in this virgin terrain, he always shuffles *off the road* to take his respite – as if aware that someone else might drive along, and not wishing to obstruct them.¹⁷

The film's most shocking sequence, however, occurs not outdoors but when mother and son sit in bed, with the window wide open to a view of blooming flowers and a nearby grassy hillside. In the usual broken sentences, the mother complains that she has nothing to wear, that she will not be able to meet people, go outside to socialize. 'Let's live without people,' the son replies: they do not need others, they can sustain themselves on their own, without outside company. Within seconds of this utterance, we switch to a tighter medium shot of Ananishnov's head in three-quarter profile, with the hillside still visible, slightly out of focus, in the background. As he listens calmly to Geyer recount the circumstances of his birth (it had been a cold day), a figure appears on the hillside; we clearly observe it walking on the grass. No need for perfect sharpness of the image to tell that he is a man, perhaps elderly, possibly using a cane (Friedrich's old man from *Chalk Cliffs of Rügen?*). He ambles unhurriedly from right to left before disappearing on the other side of the hill – his presence completely undetected by mother or son.

This scene has provoked gasps in some viewers at a number of *Mother and Son* screenings I have attended, while subsequent discussions of the film prove that other viewers completely miss the hillside stroller, perhaps because the shot (which comes about 40 minutes into the film, when part of the audience has long been lulled to sleep by the sluggish pace) is played in such a subtle, matter-of-fact manner, and it happens so quickly. The sequence seals one of the film's crowning ironies: no matter how the mother and son might consider themselves apart and isolated, that they have 'escaped to nature', they remain in fact completely tied to civilization, to their fellow man. It both prefigures and illustrates the point from



Figure 6: *The hillside stroller*. From the author's collection.

Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts' referenced in the schooner scene discussion: 'About suffering they were never wrong,/ the Old Masters: how well they understood/ Its human position; how it takes place/ While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along' (Auden 2001: 327). The world does not stop spinning during one's own private tragedies, no matter how mammoth they may seem to us personally; Sokurov reifies the idea in this shot, which requires a 'different way of seeing'.

Immediately after the train 'pierces' the son's heart (discussed above), the picture transports Ananishnov (in one shot!) to the white slope leading to the dark grove, which we will analyse below. This is a harsh, scene-to-scene cut, a rarity in *Mother and Son*; the subject goes from a flat, grassy meadow to an incline made even steeper by another of the camera's tricks.

In one of the film's most severely distorted images, Ananishnov stands on a white hillside, evidently made of hard earth or sand, and seems to defy gravity: the figure stands at a near 45-degree angle, almost parallel to the screen's bottom border. He stares forward, at a dark grove, as if contemplating his entry into the forest. Immediately before him lies a thin path – someone, or something, has been here before him. We could conclude that a deer or other animal made the path, but as Ananishnov starts walking on it, we clearly see that it consists of human foot traces; his feet fit perfectly in them as he steps. Like the double-track roads and worn paths in the meadows, this man-made roadlet appears in common use; there is nothing unspoiled about this forest and its surrounds, not even the ominous-looking grove.

Within, more surprises await the viewer (though certainly not Ananishnov, since the son remains oblivious to what I will now describe): the film's longest take, with a length of over three minutes, shows an overhead view of a tangled, murkily brown forest, the very picture of a wilderness. We see no clear path or evidence of human presence besides the son; dappled sunlight (which alters and shifts in real time) plays on the leaf-covered ground, while near-impenetrable foliage rings the upper reaches

18. Some might object that I analysed a print of the film on DVD that reproduces the image at the improper aspect ratio and shows parts of the image supposed to have been framed out. However, these episodes seem very much in keeping with Sokurov's ludic strategies in this and other films, and the 'incongruent' elements in the scene consistently appear at the *exact periphery* of the frame, as if intentionally composed to achieve the effect (see the insect and birds instances above).

of the frame. Ananishnov, lost in his own meditations, slowly wanders into this pre-lapsarian setting from the bottom of the screen, stops, and lies on the ground, blending into the darkish shadows. The composition, a lush, near-perfect Romantic forest-scape, displays tiny man dwarfed and swallowed by gargantuan nature, yet still almost in passive harmony with it.

I say 'near-perfect' and 'almost' because – if we look closely at the higher elevations of the frame, through that thick foliage on the edge of this aboriginal nature scene – we can clearly make out cars and people passing by on a busy road. The viewer does not know whether to laugh or cry at this farcical turn: as the insensible Ananishnov sprawls brooding on the turf, 'away from it all', a white car, followed shortly by a bus and what might be at least two people, cross from right to left on the wall of vegetation's far side (perhaps on their way to some outdoor concert). Yet again, as with the hillside stroller previously, Sokurov inserts these extras so unobtrusively, at the very extreme of the frame away from his ostensible main subject (the grieving son), that this misdirection of the gaze amounts to a conjurer's illusion. To those whose wandering eye catches sight of the intruders, the scene elicits more gasps. When Frederic Jameson in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* called Sokurov part of a new 'aesthetic of marginality', this is perhaps not what he meant – but he did not know how right he was.¹⁸

I have demonstrated that the nature setting in which the son actually wanders differs starkly from the one he himself perceives. He, in fact, has 'escaped' nothing: not society, not civilization, certainly not his responsibilities to the world. Sokurov does not stop there. The final example of 'psychological isolation' illustrates that, in *Mother and Son*, nature is not only contaminated by malign human influence, distorted by subjective human emotion or grotesquely blended in with human culture, but that (like the fake scale-model landscape) it is quite literally constructed, piece by piece, through human agency.

As already discussed, the schooner Ananishnov spies from his tree-lined perch announces his mother's passing, prompting him to break down in tears. It makes this announcement through a complex set of artistic, philosophical and western European associations of that particular image with death. I draw attention here to how Sokurov's invocation of those cultural links is itself doubly and triply illusory.

First, we should realize that the son never actually sees the schooner – it appears as a separate image in a shot-reaction-shot sequence. We have a portrait of Ananishnov looking off-screen, then a shot of the distant schooner, and then Ananishnov again in the same shot as before, reacting with tears. The two subjects of the separate shots never appear together in one 'unifying' image. Thus the cause and effect chain we accept so readily is a product of the most common, run-of-the-mill psychological montage; the son and the boat never 'meet'. We might even, quite rightly, say Ananishnov 'hallucinates' it.

Second (and this is simply an extension of my earlier point on the vessel's artistic lineage), the schooner is a cultureme, a quotation, 'cut' from the works of Breughel, Friedrich and the collective unconscious (where it denotes a voyage to the afterlife), and 'pasted' onto Sokurov's ten-second strip of celluloid. It has no independent reality to speak of; all signifier, it merely serves to point to something beyond itself.

Third, I use 'cut and paste', a word/image processing term, because that is precisely what Sokurov has done with the schooner, for budgetary reasons or to achieve its odd anamorphic effect. This bears some elaboration, in light of Sokurov's espoused beliefs regarding manipulated representations of nature. The director tells Schrader that he goes to so much trouble deploying anamorphic lenses, arranging the glass panels and mirrors before the camera, precisely composing the visual elements and smudging the panes with brushes because of his categorical opinion that altering the image in post-production (via computer, for example) would be dishonest.¹⁹

Sokurov claims to have altered not a frame of *Mother and Son* after filming, but the ship is clearly a post-production special effect. Not only does it stand out unnaturally against the water (as if it were near at hand, not hundreds of metres, at least, out to sea), it also speeds along much too quickly – leaving no wake. It blatantly lies in a separate visual field from the waves it 'plies'; a tiny bird very nearly transects it in mid-flight—one gets the distinct impression that just one millimetre more to the left and it would be flying *behind* the schooner, though the bird is much closer.

Sokurov's curious (and disingenuous) fetishization of the nature image as inviolate once captured on film would seem to arbitrarily apply only to inanimate objects; a similar shot, of a mammoth, abnormally close moon, appears in *Days of Eclipse*. In any case, the anamorphic, artificial schooner as *memento mori* underscores a vision of death as itself constructed, manipulable and extra-dimensional. In a contemporary climate where cinema around the world grows increasingly literalistic, Sokurov dares to announce 'this is a symbol, this is not real'. More daringly, he goes on to suggest that a made-up signifier indicates a made-up signified; there is no boat, there is no 'nature', there is no death. More radically of all: there is no *movie* – at least not the one we think we are watching.

Conclusion

Mother and Son reverses Freud's formulation that 'In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty' (Freud 1957: 246): in the son's mourning the world comes spectacularly alive – both as a narcissistic, totalized, spectral projection of ego and, parodically, as an independent (quasi-urban) reality to which the son remains oblivious. As I have shown, in whatever terms we consider Sokurov's representation of nature, we can hardly agree with Agisheva that it depicts a natural world where '[e]ither man hasn't yet arrived, and, therefore, hasn't managed to ruin anything, or he has left it once and for all'.

Kristin Thompson's writings on extra-narrative cinematic excess, proceeding from the work of Stephen Heath, Roland Barthes and the Russian Formalists, describe the term as 'the [material] aspects of the [cinematic] work not contained by its unifying forces' (Thompson 1986: 130), drawing under one rubric everything from technical errors or film flubs²⁰ to the unmotivated gestures and look of actors, to – as underscored by the title of Christian Keathley's book on cinephilia – the 'wind in the trees' of the film image.²¹ It is a critical concept for grasping a film as underhanded as *Mother and Son*.

19. He goes so far as to 'pity' the Danish director Lars von Trier for using computer software to 'enhance' his nature landscapes (now common practice) in his 1996 film *Breaking the Waves* (Schrader 1997: 25). Though of course Sokurov's own recent films, most notably *Russian Ark* (2002), have undergone extensive digital enhancement in post-production.
20. See, for example, Nitpickers.com (such sites, devoted to catching technical errors in films, are an online cottage industry) and the *Film Flubs* books. Spotting Sokurov's 'tricks' in his films provides pleasures not unlike those of the devoted 'film flub' crowd.
21. He locates the unpredictability of cinematic reception at the very heart of cinephilia: 'This fetishization of marginal, otherwise ordinary details in the motion picture image is as old as cinema itself. Indeed, as the story goes, many viewers of a century ago who watched the first films of the Lumiere Brothers were often delighted less by the scenes being staged for their amusement than by the fact that, in the background, the leaves were fluttering in the wind' (Keathley 2006: 8). Similarly, Staiger sees this 'perverse spectatorship' as an emblematic, if only recently broached, aspect of cinematic pleasure.

22. Sokurov employs a similar strategy throughout his oeuvre, most prominently in *Father and Son*, *Russian Ark* and *The Second Circle*.
23. On the director's official website, Aleksandra Tushinskaia acknowledges the use of models in *Mother and Son*: 'Sokurov, who likes to film miniature-scale models of the locations he uses in his work and create on the screen a whimsical game with scale, filmed a model of the house built to natural size in a Russian field'. Iampolskii also notes Sokurov's use of small-scale models in *Days of Eclipse* and *Save and Protect* (Iampolskii 2001: 142) as does Klawans.

Sokurov's strategic deployment of chance, misdirection, mistakes and other forms of cinematic excess creates, in Thompson's terms, a 'whole "film" existing in some sense alongside the narrative film we think of ourselves as watching' (Thompson 1986: 132). This strategy enacts a 'Sokurovian unconscious' that, as I have argued, labours throughout the film to problematize, contradict and mock the text's grave surface meaning.²²

That this aspect of Sokurov's poetics has gone largely unremarked points, first and foremost, to the director's long-standing reputation as a serious auteur, and to viewers conditioned to follow a narrative seeing what they expect to see (and succumbing to boredom when they do not see it). Yet as argued by Thompson, a reading that recognizes excess (particularly as utilized by as puckish a film-maker as Sokurov) has vast potential to deepen and widen the meaning of a film – often unpredictably so. This in turn implies – demands – a radical reassessment of what cinema itself does:

Such an approach to viewing films can allow us to look further into a film, renewing its ability to intrigue us by its strangeness; it also can help us to be aware of how the whole film – not just its narrative – works upon our perception.

(Thompson 1986: 141)

Critical to this process, of course, is attention to the clues concealed like Easter eggs along the way; amongst and against the current of verisimilitude; around, parallel to, shaded in by the diegesis; and the willingness to take up the magician's behest: 'Find What the Sailor Has Hidden', that which 'the finder cannot unsee once it has been seen' (Nabokov 1967: 310).

One such clue appears scarcely ten minutes into the film. In the shot immediately following the son's offer to 'Go for a walk', the screen fills with a landscape-like image of the house, seen from a high angle, and white cliffs (reminiscent of Friedrich's) in the distance, all loosely framed by Sokurov's 'smudges', mist and clouds. The image remains on screen for about 20 seconds, enough time to absorb but not to take in closely. At least, this seems to me an explanation for why critics tend not to mention the fact that this landscape is *fake*.

The idealized scene, with the house placed picturesquely in the landscape, is a miniature scale model, a diorama, completely static. Its view of the house is indeed too perfect; such an angle, with no trees to block it from our eye, and with no movement at all, has been created completely from scratch. As in the climactic 'exchange' of looks between father and son in *The Second Circle* (which relies on meticulously faithful mannequins for its effect), Sokurov turns to an old, low-tech cinematic device to produce an 'impossible' image.²³

The shot works, as mentioned, partly because we see it for a relatively short amount of time, and thanks to the director's other masterful trick, the fabulously life-like soundtrack. The noise of strong breezes, pounding surf, twittering wildlife, in fact, crescendoes in these 20 seconds, lending life to an ontologically dead scene. Sokurov, through this stroke, demonstrates the extent of the viewer's (unconscious) reliance on realistic aural cues to provide or fill in meaning (of course, those sounds have been doctored to achieve maximum effect). It also shows how even the most savvy filmgoers readily

accept the conventions of landscape painting; even if, like Mitchell, some may understand the artifice inherent in any such representation, not all will realize that the representation is itself doubly deceptive: an image of nature thrice-removed.

Perversely, Sokurov soon sneaks in another trace of this represented world's oddly ambiguous artifice. As the mother and son rest at the bench, Ananishnov sifts through some old postcards to read to her. On one of the postcards, framed in white, is a mechanical reproduction of a Friedrich-like landscape with mountains. The picture is too small and appears on-screen too briefly (casually shuffled along with the other papers) for the viewer to tell if the image was a painting or a photograph.

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Critical editions of films in digital formats

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Abstract

The last years of DVD releases have shown that there is a need for academic standards in the publication of films. The article argues that, with the advent of new technology, one should propose a new system of DVD editions as a standard for specialist academic editions. The article suggests a methodology of editing films and preparing them for publication in a scholarly environment.

The idea of text indexing, turning it into a network of interrelations and linking it with other texts, goes back to the philological tradition of editing scholarship, but can be transposed to other types of texts as well. For hypertextual environments the footnote has served as a prototype of linking. A hypertextual method of film publishing and publishing on film could be based on an intertwining of textual criticism and hypermedia technologies. It connects the traditional principles of annotation with digital technologies and their mark-up languages, applying hypermedia principles of commentary to the linear medium of film. Hypertextual annotations of a film are comparable to the footnotes and the commentary in historical-critical editions of texts, with the only difference being that they comprise various media forms (text, sound, images). The footnotes in these editions are linked to specific shots of a film, which the commentator wants to annotate. The annotations themselves become quotable texts, which can be referred to by other scholars.

This article was originally written in 2005. The authors have since developed the hypertextual method and called it 'Hyperkino'. Several Hyperkino DVDs are currently in production in both Moscow and Prague: for a full list see <http://www.hyperkino.net>.

Keywords

Hyperkino
methodology
DVD releases
digital technologies
reference system

Since antiquity, critical editions of historical sources and literary texts have customarily been accompanied by editorial commentaries. In contrast, the public dissemination of cinema, whether in the form of a documentary, an acted film or historical footage, has been deprived of what might be termed scholarly critical editions. Indeed, the concept of an 'edition' is rarely applied to the cinema.¹

With the appearance of new formats (VHS cassettes, CD, DVD, the Internet and to these we can now add HD-DVD and Blu-Ray) in which a film may exist, anyone so wishing can study the history, culture and art of cinema on his or her own. Cinema history and theory have become part of our general education and, in the consciousness of an educated

1. How an 'edition' of a film might look on DVD was first discussed seriously at the 'Celluloid Goes Digital: Historical-Critical Editions of Films on DVD and the Internet' conference in Trier, Germany in 2002 which was attended by archivists,

historians, lecturers in film studies and representatives from DVD companies (curators, editors and commentators). An anthology of the conference's work was published in 2003.

2. 'Textology' was a term first used by the Soviet school of textual criticism and, in particular, by Dmitrii Likhachev who specialized in the methodology of editions of texts derived from several manuscripts. See Likhachev (1983).
3. See Vonderau (2003: 43–52), where he refers to the difficulty of quoting an audio-commentary.
4. See Rostislav Iurenev's introduction to the 1967 short reconstruction of Sergei Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow* (released on DVD by Image Entertainment with that introduction and without additional commentary).
5. One further argument against the use of an oral commentary is that it cannot be included in the hypertexts on a DVD. An oral commentary cannot form part of this network of indices because it belongs to the same type of media as a film: it is linear in form. Evidently, such audio fragments (oral commentary) may, however, form a substantive part of the 'footnotes' contained on a DVD (see 'Film as hypertexts: a network of indices' below).

person, many films play as great a role as the classic works of literature. The release of a film on DVD is already redolent of the publication of a book, yet any serious discussion of the possibilities offered by a more technologically advanced scholarly commentary about cinema is only just beginning.

The main problem encountered in preparing a critical edition of a film is that there are still no academic standards in this area, although without them the discipline of film studies itself cannot properly function. Until such standards are established, this academic field will always be less highly regarded than one grounded in the study of a scholarly edition of a text prepared on the basis of a thorough textological² analysis.

The current presentation of films on DVD

The universal application of academic standards would address the most common weaknesses we have identified in current DVD releases. First, we have observed that there is often an attempt to present in a single space (i.e. the limited area represented by the screen) as much historical, technical or other information as possible. For example, some current releases have attempted to combine several moving objects (e.g. an extract from a film as a 'PIP' or a 'Picture in Picture') within a single frame. In some instances, subtitles with background information appear whilst a character in the film or the commentator is speaking (imitating the visual appearance of a footnote in an edition of a written text).

Second, our experience of often-sophisticated audio commentaries on interactive DVDs would suggest that it is preferable for the content of an oral commentary also to be presented in writing so that it may subsequently be cited or referred to in written and other publications.³ For a long time, technical difficulties hindered the development of commentaries on art forms that operate within the dimension of time, such as the cinema or theatre. Until the appearance of digital formats such as DVD, which allow us to use moving and static images equally freely, it was impossible for different types of commentary (textual and visual) to accompany a film as it was being shown. Until their appearance, the most frequent means of commenting on a film was the talking head of a film critic.⁴ This archaic form of commentary has endured and even now oral commentary, albeit in a slightly different form, is the dominant form of commentary on DVDs. However, a written commentary is a very important element in a critical edition. It will help raise the cinema's status to that of a subject worthy of such an edition and it is this 'discursification' of an audio-visual work that forms the basis for its further study.⁵

Third, an editor's or a publisher's commentary always exists on a meta-level and is authoritative. Its inherent authority should never be abused, if a critical edition of a film is to be scholarly and truly objective. It is sometimes enhanced, however, by the use of very personal oral commentary. Here, one needs to be aware of what Patrick Vonderau has called the 'emotional factor' of a DVD. For example, classical cinema is usually made more accessible when it is personalized. Often it is a well-known film critic, the director himself or a film historian who is given the task of personalizing a work. Although the emotional factor may attract a

greater number of viewers (and purchasers of the DVD), such personal commentaries should not be the only form of commentary found in the academic presentation of a film.

The methodology for a critical edition

So, how might the approach taken in philological textology (textual criticism) and publishing be applied to a film?

In textual criticism, a manuscript text is traditionally analysed in terms of two distinct categories:

1. **The *textus*** – i.e. the text that is recognized as being ‘canonical’⁶ with its variant readings. In editions that reflect current thinking, the central text has typically been supplemented by equally valuable variants comprising different authorizations and editions.⁷
2. **The *apparatus*** – i.e. a commentary on the *textus*.⁸

This distinction may be applied to an edition of a film, although we should note that the making of a film differs in certain important respects from the writing of a work of literature.

First, there are a huge number of factors influencing the final decisions taken in the production of a film. For example, the opinions of members of the film crew, the influence of the producer, the financial limitations and the technical problems that were encountered are all relevant. However significant a particular director might be, a film is rarely the creative product of an individual. Hence, a discussion of a director’s authorship (such as that encountered in literature) is perhaps not always appropriate. In a number of respects, a critical edition of a film would seem, in the absence of the documented authorship of an individual, to be more suggestive of a scholarly edition of ancient manuscripts than that of a literary text of a modern author. The question then arises as to whether a single canonical (authorized) version of a film is necessary. Such a canonical version is undoubtedly needed by film museums and by cinemas organizing screenings of reconstructed films. However, now that film history is accessible digitally, there is no real need, outside cinema theatres, for a single canonical, ‘officially blessed’ version or reconstruction of a film. Instead, we need a carefully prepared edition of the *textus*, in its entirety, accompanied by an academic commentary.

The second difference between the making of a film and the writing of a text, especially a modern text, is that film-making is a highly structured affair. The life of a film is more determined by the manner in which it was produced than is the writing of a literary work. It is in this presence of a production scheme that we can identify one advantage of commentaries on films over commentaries on literary texts. While the history of the creation of a literary text can be traced, there is no such evolution in the case of the creation of a film. There is often only the history of its alterations.

In the course of its life (i.e. before it is archived), a film⁹ goes through the following stages:

- *The idea* – i.e. the proposal
- *The script* (and its variants)

6. ‘Theologians mean by this term the text of canonical books which is officially accepted by the Church. [...] the canonical text of a classical literary work is understood to be a text which is once and forever fixed and established for all publications, a text which is robust, stable and definitive for all publications’ (Likhachev 1983: 498).
7. The *textus* is the result of the selection of all relevant (significant) variants of a work by collating (*recensio*) a text, analysing it (*examinatio*) and reconstructing it (*emendatio*) through the genealogy (the ‘stemmatology’) of all available manuscripts, known as ‘witnesses’ in textology (in the case of a film, these would be any available copies). This means that a *textus* should not be a collated construct of surviving witnesses: ‘It is completely unacceptable in any publication to mix different texts, different textual layers, different editorial versions. Collated texts in which the text is supposedly reconstructed in its original or authorial form should be decisively rejected...’ (Likhachev 1964: 76).
8. We will leave aside the terminological debate as to whether a film is a ‘text’ or not. We would suggest that the *textus* of a film is studied as a certain construct that we can comment upon using methods

developed in philology and, partly, textology.

9. Here we refer only to feature films. The scheme for a documentary film or an animated film may differ slightly.

- *The filming* (with any variants of participants and scenes)
- *The editing process* (with any variants, discarded and restored scenes)
- *The recording of the soundtrack* (with any variants of the musical or voice accompaniment of silent films, any variants of sound films (the substitution of performers, the re-recording of the soundtrack, the loss of the physical soundtrack itself) and films released in both silent and sound versions)
- *The final cut of the negative (in sound films) of the version selected to be shown to cinemagoers* – this is the point when work on the film is complete. In the case of silent cinema, the equivalent is the final cut of the positive. In other words, the original edited negative constitutes the starting point for a reading of a sound film, and the original edited positive (if it has survived) constitutes the same for a silent film. It is at this juncture that a ‘montage list’ is compiled – i.e. a detailed frame-by-frame description of the dialogue and shots of a film.
- *Distribution versions of a film* – these depend on whether a film was reworked for its re-release or for its release abroad, e.g. changes of title, a re-recording of the soundtrack, cuts by the censor or editor or the inclusion of additional shots. Each new version would have its own montage list.
- *The distribution of a film and any accompanying materials* – e.g. posters, leaflets, newspaper announcements, lists of titles, montage lists, advertising stills, trailers, press reviews or audio and video interviews.
- *The archive life of a film* – here we should consider the extent to which a benchmark version was available when the film was archived, a description of the archival work and technical operations performed, the quality and condition of the colour, image and sound of the film and the celluloid.
- *Variant copies in different archives* – i.e. the potential for a reconstruction of a fuller version. Another consideration is the likelihood that a film will be transferred on to different formats.

Despite the above differences, the fundamental issue that arises with a film’s critical edition, as is the case with a literary text, is the analysis of what belongs to the *textus* and what belongs to the *apparatus*.

The scheme for a critical edition

It is the editor of a DVD who selects the materials for inclusion on a disk. In making this selection, he needs to strike a difficult balance between what is ‘necessary’ and what is ‘sufficient’. This is a very important question even in such an advanced academic field as philology. We have outlined below our proposed universal scheme for a scholarly critical edition of a film that contains information not only for the uninitiated public, but also for the specialist.

The *textus*

In our understanding, the *textus* should consist of all the key versions of a film that might be considered complete. These include distribution versions, a ‘director’s cut’ (which might have been in his possession) or a version where the film’s production was completed by others (for example,

after the dismissal or death of the director).¹⁰ Where required, subsequent reconstructions of a lost film or a director's unrealized project might also form part of the *textus*. The range of versions available to a contemporary DVD 'publisher' may be endless. Here are only a few examples:

1. There are films that have survived in a single canonical version.
2. There are 'lost' films which have no historically authentic version – e.g. Lev Kuleshov's *Engineer Prite's Project* (*Proekt inzhenera Prita*, 1918) – i.e. the official distribution version has not survived, or perhaps never existed at all.¹¹
3. There are films that have two or more versions. In such cases, it is possible to include on a DVD both a variant that existed prior to a reconstruction and one that existed afterwards.
 - Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, 1925) – the original Soviet version shown at the film's premiere in the Bolshoi Theatre has not survived. However, there are later versions in existence, such as the 'Berlin version' prepared in 1926, which was partly edited by Eisenstein himself.
 - Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) – there is the well-known attempt by Enno Patalas to assemble a benchmark version from the many distribution and censored copies available.
 - There may be silent and sound versions of the same film – e.g. Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929).
 - There may be multiple-language versions or MLVs.¹² Well-known examples would be Alfred Hitchcock's *Mary* (1930), a German-language version of *Murder* with a German cast, the English-language version of Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel*, 1930) or George Melford's Spanish-language version of *Dracula* (1931) filmed contemporaneously with Tod Browning's English-language version.
 - Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Michurin* (1948) – the film was subject to a large number of alterations by the censor. These distorted the director's original idea to such a degree that Dovzhenko refused to acknowledge the film as his work. Other notable instances of cuts imposed by the censor can be found in American cinema following the introduction of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association of America Inc.'s Motion Picture Production Code (the 'Hayes Code') in 1930 – e.g. the nude scenes cut from Cedric Gibbons and Jack Conway's *Tarzan and His Mate* (1934).
 - Marlen Khutsiev's *The Ilich Gate* (*Zastava Il'icha*, 1961) – certain scenes were re-filmed, which gave the author the opportunity to finish the film as he had intended it, although this was done under the watchful eye of the censor. All the same, this later version remains authorial and was well known. For a long time, it existed under the title *I Am Twenty* (*Mne dvadtsat' let*, 1965). This is partly also the case with Andrei Tarkovskii's film *The Passion of Andrei* (*Strast' Andreia*, 1966), an earlier variant of his *Andrei Rublev* (1969).
 - There are films which exist in the form of a 'director's cut'¹³ or in one or more studio cuts (especially cuts prepared for the re-release of the film) – e.g. George Cukor's *A Star is Born* (1954).¹⁴ Perhaps the

10. It is debatable whether the *textus* should include all available 'angles' from the shooting of a film.
11. The company absolutMedien is releasing an academic edition of *Engineer Prite's Project* in 2008. A pilot DVD that included versions of the film before and after reconstruction was presented by the authors in Berlin in November 2004 and in Prague in January 2005.
12. For a recent discussion of MLVs, see Szczepanik (2004: 55–65).
13. It has been suggested that this term was first used by J. Harvey who in the 1980s screened original versions of Bernardo Bertolucci's *1900* (Novecento, 1976), Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time in the West* (*C'era una volta il West*, 1968) and *Heaven's Gate* on Z Channel, a Californian cable TV channel.
14. The studio cut the film after its premiere by 30 minutes despite the objections of the director and producer. In the early 1980s the missing footage was reinstated, though it partly had to be reconstructed on the basis of production stills. Accessed 25 April 2008.

15. This version not only includes additional scenes and changes to the film's soundtrack, but is also an interesting example of material being taken from the 'extras' section of the initial DVD release and incorporated into a new cut of the film on the second DVD release. By incorporating pages from 'Philosophy of Time Travel', previously only accessible as a DVD extra, this new cut blurs the distinction between the *textus* and the *apparatus*. See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0246578/alternateversions>. Accessed 25 April 2008.

16. 'An archaeographic introduction [...] differs from a textological study. Only archaeographic information is cited in it: information as to where manuscripts are kept, as to the handwriting, as to watermarks on the paper and, on the basis of the study of this information, a classification by edition and form is made. An archaeographic introduction has the quality of a reference work: it must be convenient to use when making inquiries and, consequently, short, laconic and clear. There should be no elements of scholarly research in the archaeographic introduction. They must be in the textological introduction' (Likhachev 1983: 538).

most notable example of studio interference is Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1981). The running time of the director's original version was 5 hours and 25 minutes. Cimino's recut version lasted 3 hours and 40 minutes but this was withdrawn from circulation after the first screening and the studio then cut a further 70 minutes. A director's cut of *Heaven's Gate* was released in Europe in 2004 and America in 2005. A recent example of a questionable director's cut would be Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001).¹⁵

- Orson Welles left behind a substantial number of unfinished projects that were abandoned at the stage of isolated takes of film scenes and edited versions that were never completed or distributed.
 - Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (1927) – this has been restored by Kevin Brownlow on three occasions – in 1980, 1983 and 2000. The 2000 reconstruction, lasting 5 hours and 31 minutes, included the celebrated triptych finale and involved authentic process dye bath colour tints and toning by the National Film and Television Archive in the United Kingdom.
 - The films of Jacques Tati, George Lucas (see the special edition of his *Star Wars* series prepared in 1997) and Francis Ford Coppola (see the re-release of his 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* as *Apocalypse Now Redux* in 2001) – what is noteworthy here is that scenes were filmed many years later which were incorporated into an existing version which had already been in distribution. These are cases of an authorial reworking of a film, distributed as having the same value as the original version.
4. There are also digital releases that appeared shortly after the cinema distribution copies. For example, the DVD releases of Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!* and Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* were issued by the authors themselves or with their involvement.
 5. Finally, pirate or bootleg video and DVD versions appearing before the official premiere of a film are a curious example. It is quite possible that they differ significantly from the official version.

The apparatus

The *apparatus* primarily includes everything that did not make the final version of the film or was cut from it. In addition, it would include documents and other materials relating to the history of a film and the annotations and commentaries of the film's 'publishers'.

A critical edition of a film requires a commentary comprised of indexed 'footnotes' having two forms. The first type of footnote is textological and archaeographic.¹⁶ These are footnotes relating to the physical formats or copies of a film. Places requiring commentary are marked – for example, lacunae in a copy of a film, external marks on the celluloid that were the cause of a restorer's work on a copy, technical additions made by a reconstruction specialist or those points in a film that were envisaged in the different variants of the author's vision of a film or affected by distribution cuts and/or replacements. The second type of footnote is conceptual. These footnotes comment on the meaning or the visual side of the *textus*. They could include background explanations as to the everyday

life portrayed, fragments from other films commenting on the *textus* and an explanation of a film's place in the creative life of its director and its evolution.

Regardless of their character, either of these two types of footnote would consist of written text, video, audio or photo extracts in all possible combinations and could form large syntagmatic lines in the commentary similar to those in the director's and cameraman's storyboards which constitute the basis of a film.

The archaeography and textology of a film

Of primary importance here, unquestionably, is the archive life of a film (e.g. the technical data relating to the original copy). Much depends on how detailed the archive catalogue is and how precise is the data contained therein. An archaeographic description of a film must contain all the available information about its physical format. Such information should cover:

- The processing work carried out on a film in the archive and a description of the technical operations performed
- An analysis of the condition of the colour, image and sound of the film and also of the celluloid
- A description and systemization of any external markings and symbols on the celluloid: (1) start numbers and the numbers marking each foot of film, (2) notes made by the editors, (3) markings made by a film's authors indicating the order in which the frames should be edited and their colouring, (4) any data as to the celluloid manufacturer, (5) any traces of the making of contratypes or the film's transfer onto another format (for example, from nitrate to acetate), (6) title inserts for foreign distributors of silent cinema, and (7) any traces of mechanical damage

Without such a preparatory archaeographic description, any textological analysis is impossible and, for a critical edition (i.e. the release) of a relatively 'ancient' film, a thorough textological study is the only means of demonstrating the validity of the steps taken by the DVD publisher.

Documents and materials relating to the history of a film

As a rule, the making of a film is documented at each stage of the process. It is these documentary stages that form the framework structure, which may be completed with all types of surviving documentation of interest to historians. Amongst them, for example, could be the following (in brackets we have indicated the possible ways in which these documents could be presented on a DVD):

- A script proposal or libretto, and a contract with the authors (as a text or photograph)
- A literary script, if it is of key significance (as a text)
- A director's script, i.e. the director's¹⁷ or cameraman's storyboard,¹⁸ if it existed (the differences between the storyboards and the final product can tell an attentive historian a great deal. They can be assembled to run more or less parallel to the film, enabling the viewer to study the

17. Examples of a director's storyboard could be the preliminary frame-by-frame drawings (made prior to the commencement of filming) for Aleksandr Medvedkin's films such as *Happiness* (1934), which are kept in the Cinema Museum in Moscow, or the well-known working sketches of Sergei Eisenstein, Alfred Hitchcock or, more recently, Tim Burton.

18. The storyboards of Sergei Urusevskii for *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, 1957) and *The Letter Which Was Not Sent* (*Neotpravlennoe pis'mo*, 1959)) are examples of a cameraman's storyboards that are available for study.

19. Patrick Vonderau notes this important advantage for DVDs – i.e. the ability to index or mark-up a film.

extent to which the film corresponds to the initial concept) and a shooting plan (such as that sometimes used by Vertov and generally found in documentary cinema) (as photographs)

- Materials relating to the shooting of the film (test photos of different actors for the same role, variations of *mise-en-scène*, sketches for sets, costume drawings, behind the scenes footage, reports and interviews on the set and shooting diaries (as photographs, video and audio tracks or as a text))
- Differently edited versions of scenes and takes of episodes which the author did not intend to be included in the final cut (as a video track)
- The soundtrack:
 1. In the case of a silent film: Variations of the musical and/or vocal accompaniment for a film (e.g. a recording on gramophone records, a musical recording derived from the original score, notes, musical scores or scripts for the accompanying music)
 2. In the case of a sound film: Variations of the soundtrack (e.g. a replacement of the phonogram, a re-recording of the soundtrack, the loss of the physical soundtrack itself or the film's dubbing into other languages) (as video tracks)
- A montage list (as a text or photographs)
- The distribution life of a film (e.g. posters, leaflets, announcements in periodicals, lists of titles, advertising photographs, press reviews and post-filming interviews (as photographs and video tracks))
- Literary memoirs, audio recordings, documentary and TV films (as text, audio and video tracks)

Biographies and filmographies

Biographies and filmographies are only needed when the relevant data cannot be found in other reference works. Otherwise, it would seem sufficient to refer to bibliographies (as a text). Information about changes made to a film's name could also be included (e.g. variations of working titles in contemporary press coverage or a change to the title for foreign distribution) (as a text or photographs).

Hence, a film's critical edition must, of necessity, be multi-layered. We have the film itself as an object (often itself already multi-layered) and the meta-level consisting of academic commentary. Between these layers there are materials concerning the history of the film demonstrating how it operated within the culture of its time and its place in history.

The relationship between these three, non-hierarchical levels will become clear and distinct only when linked by the unifying principles of indexing which create non-linear hypertexts out of the three levels. Curiously, this has been technically possible for several years already,¹⁹ but no one has, so far, applied this approach to the academic commentary of moving images.

Film as hypertext: a network of indices

Despite the apparent variety of forms that the *apparatus* and the *textus* may take, they can, nonetheless, be condensed into a very simple and practical indexing scheme that will enable a viewer to navigate this sea of abundant

information. If a simple, intuitive system of indexing and navigation is used, the abundance of documents will not be psychologically off-putting. Every DVD user, from the professional to the student, or simply an interested layman, can easily find in a critical edition whatever he needs.

We need to move away from the labyrinthine system in existence today for which a viewer needs a mnemonic 'guiding light' to recall the route taken from a DVD's table of contents to a particular point in a film or a particular extra. The solution can be found in the system of indexed footnotes and cross-references that has been established over centuries. These allow a reader easily and, importantly, visually to find his way through the diverse commentary.

Prepared in accordance with a film's structural biography, indexed footnotes will be visually familiar to anyone who has seen an annotated book, and will enable the systematic, academic work of a commentator to be compatible with the need to search for information simply and quickly. Film viewers need a reconstructed film that is accompanied on a DVD by conclusive arguments of both a textual and conceptual nature. The question as to the limits of commentary then falls away, as everything that a publisher considers necessary may be included on a DVD. Furthermore, there is nothing preventing each footnote (a photograph or an audio, video or text extract) from having its own index allowing a DVD user to:

- Return to the film
- Return to the main menu
- Continue in a chosen syntagmatic sequence (or path) or
- Move to a different, yet semantically related, syntagmatic sequence in either the *textus* or the *apparatus*

Obviously, a viewer (i.e. the user of a DVD) must independently be able to activate any block of information as and when he wishes or requires. Under no circumstances should any amount of information that is psychologically difficult to absorb be forced upon a viewer. The viewer must be able to choose.

The principle of indexing

It is interesting to note that the principles of indexing have, so far, never been applied to critical editions of film classics, although they have been actively employed in certain DVD releases of contemporary films on which the authors themselves – the director, the script writer or the cameraman – have been involved, rather than a third-party publisher. For example, the German DVD release of Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) has a link in the form of a fairy on which a viewer may click to access behind the scenes footage of the same scene; and Becker's *Goodbye Lenin* (2003) has links that appear on the screen as red stars. These lead the viewer to different types of ethnographic commentary informing him, slightly humorously, about the everyday realities of life in the former German Democratic Republic.

Clearly, the use of an index is still perceived by DVD publishers as being part of a game, although an index is the most precise, economic and least troublesome way of annotating a particular aspect of a film (for example, a particular editing cut, a detail within a particular frame or the use of

sound). The advantage of indexing lies in the fact that it links the 'horizontal' (temporal, syntagmatic) level of a film on a DVD with the 'vertical' (paradigmatic) commentary level, offering an endless variety and richness of content. It allows each DVD user to devise his own path through an interactive DVD. Furthermore, the footnotes on a DVD can themselves become a free-standing text (resembling a coherent, logical commentary and constructing a spider's web of links between distant points in a film and its milieu) or a group of audio-visual annotations.

In such a case, the footnotes can operate without any need for the film itself to be watched at the same time. The footnotes will have their own numbering system, according to which a viewer, or rather the reader, can progress without any need to return to the film itself. If the reader works at a computer, he could export and copy these texts together with the illustrations and cite them, indicating the number of the particular footnote.

The principle of navigation

'Indexing' and 'navigation' are not interchangeable concepts. By indexing we mean that a DVD should show the viewer those places in the *textus* that require comment. Navigation is instead concerned with the general structure (or scheme) according to which a viewer may move around the *textus* and *apparatus*.

The conventional system of DVD navigation in use today follows the same principle as the table of contents of a book. At first this looks familiar, but it is an inconvenient method. We have only directions to the beginning of chapters (being rough sections or episodes, artificially imposed on the film by an often anonymous compiler). The principle of annotatory footnotes is not used at all. As a result, a DVD viewer must always return to the start when searching for a particular section. The resulting labyrinth, which recalls a computer's filing system with an obligatory home directory, is of no use when a viewer needs to locate information quickly and accurately.

In lieu of an epilogue

With the arrival of digital formats, it was widely thought that the CD or DVD would soon replace, for example, the publication of encyclopaedias in book format or even books themselves.

The compactness and speed with which one can search and other advantages of digital information formats are undoubtedly important. However, mankind has continually added to the variety of cultural forms in existence, and has not necessarily reduced their number for the sake of standardization and unification. Only the technological parameters of cultural forms have been standardized and unified, something that has been necessary for the rapid expansion in their possible applications. Cinema did not kill off the theatre, television did not kill off cinematography and the Internet did not kill off television. The forms in which these media are used are simply modified.

Electronic information formats will not replace the book. A cultural form's application has a very important psychological aspect, namely the ability of its user to imagine the object or subject in its entirety. A book allows a reader to do this, but a text on the screen of a computer does not.

Turning the pages of a book, a reader can grasp immediately the volume of text, the number of footnotes, the principle according to which they have been compiled and other features needed to work with the book. On a computer screen, none of these things are indicated. Any text is 'one size only'. It stretches to infinity; its very presentation is not suggestive of a coherent whole. That is why an interactive DVD with a systematic navigation facility could combine the advantages of the prevailing book culture with the new opportunities offered by digital formats for the presentation of audio-visual material.

In addition, most modern formats for digital information revolve (i.e. they are disks). To use them, additional equipment is required. We need a means of transforming them into an optical state capable of being appreciated by the human eye.

The rapid development of non-rotating (immobile) formats, such as today's memory cards or flash cards, might easily mean, in time, that it will be possible for a thin magnetic strip requiring no external energy source to be stored on any optical surface. Maybe there will then be books with moving illustrations or with an infinite volume of text. In any case, there will be objects of an optical nature needing no additional mechanisms or devices in order for them to be used, and which are instantly comprehensible.

DVD is far from being the evolutionary acme of audio-visual information storage. It is difficult to say now what will replace the DVD but, for the moment, there is nothing better.

In the critical editions of films on DVD that we have advocated, the most important element is the use of non-linear hypertexts permitting a viewer to work with marked (or indexed) sections of the linear *textus*. The chief distinction between the critical edition of a film on DVD and the search function capability of the Internet is that, when using a hypertext on a DVD, we are not offered random information selected on the basis of a common factor. Instead, by adopting the rigorous approach outlined above, we will have information that has been carefully selected by the editor and commentator, has been academically argued and has the widest possible range of uses.

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Eisenstein on Hollywood

Richard Taylor *Swansea, Wales*

The Swedish film specialist Lars Kleberg recently sent me a copy of a hitherto unfamiliar, and somewhat erratically translated, article by Eisenstein published in the American journal *International Literature* in 1933.¹ Naum Kleiman has identified the American article as part of one published in Russian in *Proletarskoe kino* in the summer of 1932, shortly after Eisenstein's return from North America in May. The Russian article, published under the title 'Catch Up and Overtake', was a revised version of a speech given by Eisenstein to NIKFI, the Scientific Research Institute for Cinema and Photography, in Moscow.² Three decades later the published article was to be included in the fifth volume of Eisenstein's *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, published in Moscow in 1968, but the newly discovered version of *Montage* meant that it had to be omitted for reasons of space. The article has not therefore appeared in its complete form in Russian since 1932 and this is the first full English translation.

Eisenstein's sojourn in the United States of America and later Mexico between 1930 and 1932 was overshadowed by misunderstandings and rumours from both the American and Soviet sides. When he returned to the Soviet Union in May 1932, it was clearly in his interests to ingratiate himself with the Soviet cultural authorities who had, in the three years of his absence, presided over a campaign of 'proletarianization' and were now presenting themselves as guarantors of more inclusive 'Soviet' policies following the liquidation of all proletarian cultural organizations by decree on 23 April 1932.³ The head of Soviet cinema, Boris Shumiatskii, was developing his idea of a 'Soviet Hollywood', a system that would produce a mass popular cinema with socialist (and soon socialist realist) content. Whatever else Eisenstein could be accused of, in 1932 it was certainly not the making of popular films, at least not the kind of mass entertainment films that Shumiatskii had in mind and that Eisenstein's former assistant, Grigorii Aleksandrov, was soon to provide in his series of musical comedies beginning with *The Happy Guys* (*Veselye rebiata*) in 1934.

On a broader level, the campaign to modernize Soviet agriculture and industry led to comparisons with the United States of America and a belief that the Soviet Union could borrow both experts and their expertise from the United States as a springboard to develop its own superior systems – the slogan for this campaign was 'Catch up and overtake!' The campaign was reflected in films such as Aleksandr Macheret's *Men and Jobs* (*Dela i liudi*, 1932).

1. 'The Cinema in America: Some Impressions of Hollywood', *International Literature*, 1933, no. 3, pp. 97–105.
2. 'Dognat' i peregnat', *Proletarskoe kino*, 1932, no. 15/16, pp. 20–32.
3. R. Taylor and I. Christie (eds), *The Film Factory*, London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 325.

In his article Eisenstein highlights the discrimination against what he called 'negroes', and what we would nowadays call 'African Americans', in the United States. This too was a common theme of Soviet propaganda in the 1930s and is again reflected in films such as the animated short based on Maiakovskii's poem, *Black and White* (*Blek end uait*, 1932) or Aleksandrov's second musical comedy *The Circus* (*Tsirk*, 1936)

This article needs then to be seen as Eisenstein's attempt to reintegrate himself into a Soviet cinema in which he was not longer a star director. As long as Shumiatskii was alive and in charge, this attempt was destined to fail for a variety of reasons more complex than is often appreciated. One significant reason was Eisenstein's failure to complete another film, and



Figure 1: Cover of the Proletarskoe kino issue of 1932.

that again was for a variety of complex reasons. In January 1935 at the conference to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of Soviet cinema, Eisenstein was pointedly not given a major award, merely the minor honour of the title 'Honoured Artist', and his career as a 'popular' film-maker only took off with the completion of *Alexander Nevsky* after Shumiatskii was arrested in January 1938 and shot the following summer.

It is clear from 'Catch Up and Overtake' that Eisenstein did admire various aspects of the Hollywood production machine, as indeed did Shumiatskii, but that admiration is here shrouded in a generally critical stance towards Hollywood for its integral role in the capitalist cultural system and for the enormous waste of resources involved in its production process. The political context of 1932 is further illuminated by comparing this article with Eisenstein's 1942 article, 'American Cinema and its Fight against Fascism', similarly based on a speech, but this time delivered after the United States had entered the Second World War in December 1941.⁴ Eisenstein was after all working, or trying to work, in the 1930s in a system where, even more than in Hollywood at the time, the line between politics and culture was almost always less than crystal clear.

I am deeply indebted to Lars Kleberg, Naum Kleiman, Birgit Beumers, Mark Glancy, Jeffrey Richards and, above all, to Julian Graffy for their assistance with various aspects of this translation, but any faults that remain are mine and mine alone. I should like to dedicate this translation to the memory of Josephine Woll (1950–2008), immensely courageous scholar, teacher and friend, who is sadly missed by all who knew and worked with her.

Sergei Eisenstein: Catch Up and Overtake

Translated and annotated by **Richard Taylor**

This is a summary of the impressions of a visiting foreigner. This is about how one of the greatest and culturally most significant branches of industry is headed by hidebound and conservative people who have come from businesses like canning, paper processing, soap manufacturing, processing used goods or manufacturing third-rate new ones.

This will be a dismal picture, describing how innumerable people in charge of a large number of varied departments outstrip one another in a continuous race to evade personal and individual responsibility. People who throw the volleyball of individual responsibility to one another with lightning speed so that, in the end, when they have all piled up together, they take a decision on their collective conscience, which is made up of individuals' lack of conscience.

This is about those who, imperiously blinded by their own dubious merits, cannot resist actively interfering in the area of other people's creativity, an intervention that is not motivated by any aptitude and that has no grounds higher than the administrators' chairs that they sit on.

4. R. Taylor (ed.), *The Eisenstein Collection*, London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2006, pp. 404–14.

5. There is a Russian pun here: *shtat* can mean both 'state' and 'staff'.
6. The Varangians were the Viking warriors who spread out from Scandinavia through what is now eastern Russia and Ukraine in the ninth and tenth centuries AD.
7. Eisenstein used this image to caricature Kerensky in *October* (*Oktiabr'*, 1927).
8. The reference is to Mitrofanushka, the spoiled and stupid boy in Fonvizin's play *The Minor* (*Nedorosl'*).
9. The idea of current sacrifice for a 'bright future' was a constant theme of Soviet propaganda at this time.

However, the powers-that-be have modestly surrounded themselves with a swarm of artistic advisers and consultants, consisting of the fruits of that same orchard who can compete in their incompetence with the business heads themselves.

This is about how the managers, when they take up their posts, following a whimsical pattern, accumulate a horde of relatives and kinsfolk who, like a nomadic tribe, pursue their provincial advancement from town to town, state to state – from state to staff,⁵ from one personal establishment to another.

It is not their personal prowess or their exalted qualities that dictate these indissoluble bonds, but the voice of blood and the bright youthful memories of a common dark past.

This is about how, from time to time, an excellent and unexpected idea for a script falls from the boundless azure of the heavens on them, an idea that they did not sow, but that they will reap all the more intensely for that reason. This is about how this excellent idea, thanks to people who are in no way responsible for its emergence, joins the endless conveyor belt of quite irreversible, gradual mutilation, emasculation and dismal vulgarization at the hands of the torturers on the feature-film script board.

When, once in a blue moon, this joyous and quite unprepared phenomenon emerges, when it is finally captured by the grubby hands of the regiments of re-workers, it suddenly and unexpectedly comes face to face with someone who is even more extraneous and alien to it – the so-called director whose intention is to realize the idea on kilometres of celluloid for consumption by the millions, who are in the meantime unexpectedly and accidentally brought into an alliance. Often the director once came from foreign parts, he is some kind of overseas Varangian⁶ of cinema with the glittering fan of a peacock's tail set with the peacock's feathers of professional advertisement.⁷ Because the admiration for 'imported genius' is boundless.

Meanwhile, in the dark beyond the bright glare of the studio's ocean of spotlights, there are swarms of talented young persons who need help to take their first step in the profession, who lack the stretched-out hand and the modest opportunity to test their strengths where the transient rogue is conjuring up a plywood universe from the earth, destroying it once again, so that six months later he can summon it to life again, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, on that very same seaboard.

The round numbers of above-average salaries and the delights of the gardens of servitude rain down at the feet of any passing hypocrite or successful home-grown Mitrofanushka⁸ who has temporarily abandoned his beloved homeland in order to enrich himself in the suspect lustre of imported gilt, spiced up with a foreign accent, whereas a talented young person, deprived of even a wretched protective roof over his young head, is forced to go round in circles and ... curse his lot.

Lastly, some impressions of that bright, health-giving, powerful giant of united creative forces that stands at the apex of an elevated appreciation of its own cultural role and, through its vitality, energy and activity, is leading the art of cinema into a bright future [*svetloe budushchee*]⁹ in defiance of everything.

However, we must admit that on closer examination this social giant turns out to be far from bright, far from health-giving and far from powerful, but a giant with a highly suspect appreciation of its own cultural role and

an extremely relative vitality and boundlessness of energy and activity in all those cases where it is not a matter of narrow individual and personal career interests or of activity such as intrigue or trouble-making.

I shall be talking about American cinema.

1.¹⁰

When in the days of our tender youth we all studied a bit of this and that¹¹ in our elementary political education according to 'Berdnikov',¹² we were thoroughly drilled in the so-called chaos of capitalist production.

But the logic of these dry lines was not enough to dispel our image of the Americanized superman with a calculating machine instead of a heart and a railway timetable, accurate to the nearest second, for every area of life replacing his organizing brain. This was an image that had been fed by cheap popular literature about the two-legged giants of industry, who, at the press of a single button, transferred world markets from one hemisphere to another, as was our view of those engineers with a steely look in their blue eyes, which seemed to have grasped the whole atavistic mystique of the superstitious consequences of the western European Middle Ages in the steel cables of exact science, of mechanical and mathematical formulae, and eventually it was fed also by a brilliant fascination with the energy expended by the virtuosos of crime in their endless chivalrous tournaments on the bridgeheads of our screens, battling against no less brilliant and energetic detectives, who defeat them by the 'scientific methods' and 'exact science' used to detect their crimes. That the imaginary detective frequently turns out to be a criminal, while the criminal remains just that, is utterly unimportant.

Hypnotism of and charm beyond the good and evil of morality were always present behind the inimitable clarity of the apparently non-metaphysical knowledge of reality, of human nature, of the labyrinth of the human psyche and the labyrinths of three-level underground railways, human relationships and entanglements.

Looking at items of domestic equipment or objects flitting across the screen, you could discern behind them these people who have a complete knowledge of natural phenomena and human personality and who, through their absolute knowledge, play faultlessly on the keyboard of human passion and interests.

And suddenly the whole system cracked.

Cracked on a worldwide scale.

Cracked in the suit of armour worn by the idealized giant of the American obsession with technology, exact science and rationalization – from the installation of water closets to the higher activity of nerve centres.

Cracked in that visible exterior, which bristles with skyscrapers and which is visible to the naked eye on the surface, which blinds and overshadows timid onlookers who have in truth been fed on the overwhelming hypnotism of the huge amount of American advertising.

This illusory power fell at the final test – the test of economics, the test of the truth or falsehood of the socio-economic system.

But every minute and every hour this illusion about the steel giant of absolute knowledge is collapsing in every field and individual instance where it has the least contact with areas that, even if only by a single step,

10. The extract that appeared in *International Literature* started here.

11. Allusion to Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, chapter 1, stanza 5.

12. Aleksandr I. Berdnikov, student revolutionary and co-author of the post-Revolutionary *A Course in Political Education* (*Kurs politgramoty*).

13. William Harrison Hays, Sr. (1879–1954), Republican politician from Indiana. In 1921–22 he was US postmaster-general but resigned to become the first president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), a post he held until he retired in 1945.

deviate from the psychological process that produces the crankshaft, the fly-wheel or the hoist.

Just as the Wall Street billionaires collapse headlong into the bottomless pit of the 'Great Depression', so the illusion of the capitalist economy is forever discredited, and in the passing impressions of a traveller in the United States the myth collapses of the steel dragon of the absolute knowledge of purpose, which has become the absolute knowledge of the methods by which that purpose can be achieved.

That purpose, the methods, and the hysterical application of those methods, are clear in only one thing – the merciless resistance to the revolutionary pressure which is spreading through the skull of the steel giant.

Here is the refined, purposeful, sophisticated machinery for the suppression and suffocation of everything that is alive and kicking because everything that is genuinely alive and kicking must inevitably lead, and is leading towards revolution.

Hence any toleration in the field of morality that imprudently permits a skirt to be shortened even by a couple of inches already represents to the mediaeval American moral fanatics of today a fear of complete toleration, toleration with a capital letter, that would sooner or later sweep them all away to Hell in a handcart.

From the whole highly sophisticated collection of equipment and organizations to smother the development of revolutionary activity and consciousness we shall restrict ourselves to an examination of the organization of our personal acquaintance, Will Hays.¹³ It falls to his organization to carry out this venerable task through the organism of 21,000 cinema theatres, the US distribution system and the millions of minds of the population of this Promised Land.

They call Will Hays a dictator and a tsar, the man who determines the fates of people working in films. The organization that he heads, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), is in fact terribly powerful and can, with the speed of an electric current, paralyse in two ticks any unwelcome phenomenon and force it to sit in the gynaecological chair for a Hays inspection.

But the great, poor, omnipotent and insignificant Hays himself sits between ... two stools.

By order of his office, an obstinate firm may be brought to the verge of ruin through a multimillion dollar boycott of its film production; a film star who is not entirely circumspect in questions of morality can be condemned to starve to death in a whirlwind of newspaper sensation stirred up against him or her; an undesirable foreigner of 'offensive colour' can be moved to an unambiguous proximity to the ocean or to the border with a neighbouring tropical country.

But what is this fairy-tale strength based on and what is the price that is being paid for such power?

Officially there is no censorship in America.

The Statue of Liberty towers over the unbounded oceans of film art in the same way that it extends a welcoming torch at the entrance to the port of New York. In its sanctimoniousness and vacuity it makes no concessions to this older sister, which, in the vacant innards of its gigantic torso contains only a double spiral staircase, with an endless flow of inquisitive tourists

clambering up and down – up to the torch of Liberty and down to the waves – equally washing over the base of ‘Liberty’ and the neighbouring island in New York harbour, the quarantine prison on the ‘Isle of Tears’, for many only a temporary foretaste of the whole continent, where life was to be just as hard.¹⁴

The freedom that uncensored American cinema is indulged in is worse than any bondage: the Senate on Capitol Hill in Washington DC refrains from promulgating a censorship law, craftily suspending over the heads of the cinema industry the sword of Damocles of the possibility of promulgating such a law if it transpires that their film production does not match up to the moral and political standards of the average American housewife or Presbyterian minister.

In a mouse-like panic the movie magnates come running into the MPPDA and elevate Will Hays to an all-powerful post with almost unlimited plenary powers.

But this splendid demiurge is pathetic: the former postmaster-general under the fraudulent Harding presidency, a demiurge who has been forced to walk the tightrope like a little dog held on a lead by the provincial psyche of the half-witted members of the all-American ladies’ clubs or of a direct wire from the White House, whose purpose was to whitewash Wall Street’s dark greed into the sanctimonious white of a provincial code of virtues.

Thus are the splendid decorative skyscrapers economically held on a lead by the miserly, obtuse and narrow-minded provincial brass farthing.

Thus is the flight of any creative impulse in cinema reduced to the intellectual level of the petty bourgeois distributor and philistine consumer, who is in fact cinema’s owner and dictator and who gives his orders from his headquarters to the skyscrapers’ proud spires.

Will Hays’s organization represents America’s unofficial censorship.

It has been organized by the movie businessmen themselves and it is supported by a widely developed organized ‘public opinion’ in the system of ladies’ clubs, of associations of the Daughters of the American Revolution, of all sorts of societies that simply unite sons of bitches, like the fascist ‘Blue Shirt’ organization and its not unknown rogue, Major Pease.¹⁵ Their sole aim is the pitiless struggle against Communism in all its manifestations and against the Soviet Union in the first instance.

And the 33 religions in the United States, which are ready, under the system of competition, to bite one another’s throats for every additional adherent of their religious bent and, consequently, a ‘voluntary donor’ to their plate, and not to that of the church round the corner, are always ready to take up arms in orderly unison in a crusade against the red contagion.

The iron claw of political asphyxiation, which is between the lines, and the collected good rules of moral behaviour have been incorporated into a printed code:

The Motion Picture Production Code

Preamble:

Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment.

14. Reference to nearby Ellis Island, where immigrants were processed.

15. Major Frank Pease, self-styled ‘professional American patriot’, had led the campaign against Eisenstein’s presence in the United States, denouncing him as part of a ‘Jewish Bolshevik conspiracy’ to ‘turn the American cinema into a Communist cesspool’.

16. Eisenstein omits the next paragraph: 'During the rapid transition from silent to talking pictures they have realized the necessity and the opportunity of subscribing to a Code to govern the production of talking pictures and of re-acknowledging this responsibility.' All quotations from the Production Code are from L.J. Jeff and J.L. Simmons (eds), *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship and the Production Code*, Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2001, pp. 285–300.

17. Eisenstein omits the second numbered point: 'Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented,' although he subsequently cites it.

18. Instead of 'Revenge in modern times shall not be justified,' Eisenstein moves the fourth point under the broader heading 'Crimes against the Law' to make the third point in the section on murder.

19. Eisenstein omits the clause on adultery and illicit sex.

They recognize their responsibility to the public because of this trust and because entertainment and art are important influences in the life of a nation.

Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purpose of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking...¹⁶

General Principles:

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience shall never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong-doing, evil or sin...¹⁷
2. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

Particular Applications:

I. Crimes against the Law

These shall never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation.

1. *Murder*

- (a) The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation.
- (b) Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail.
- (c) The use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown.¹⁸

II. Sex

The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing...¹⁹

2. *Scenes of passion*

- (a) They should not be introduced when not essential to the plot.
- (b) Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures are not to be shown.
- (c) In general, passion should be treated in such manner as not to stimulate the lower and baser element.

3. *Seduction or rape*

- (a) They should never be more than suggested, and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method.
- (b) They are never the proper subject for comedy.

4. *Sex perversion* or any inference to it is forbidden.

5. *White-slavery* shall not be treated.

6. *Miscegenation* (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden.
7. *Sex hygiene* and venereal diseases are not proper subjects for motion pictures.
8. *Scenes of actual childbirth*, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented.
9. *Children's sex organs* are never to be exposed ...²⁰

VI. Costume

1. *Complete nudity* is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture.
2. *Undressing scenes* should be avoided, and never used save where essential to the plot ...²¹
4. *Dancing costumes* intended to permit undue exposure of indecent movements in the dance are forbidden.

VII. Dances

1. Dances suggesting or representing sexual actions or indecent passion are forbidden ...²²

VIII. Religion

1. No film or episode may throw *ridicule* on any religious faith.
2. *Ministers of religion* in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or villains ...²³

IX. Locations

The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy ...²⁴

XII. Repellent Subjects

The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste.

1. *Actual hangings* or electrocutions as legal punishments for crime
2. *Third-degree* methods
3. *Brutality* and possible gruesomeness
4. *Branding* of people or animals
5. *Apparent cruelty* to children or animals ...²⁵
6. *Surgical operations*

By way of a digression I should like to say something in particular about these 'third-degree' methods of interrogation.

These specimens of real-life practice are highly relevant in the sphere of art, in parallel with the utmost 'delicacies' of the Code.

'Third degree' is the so-called summary of the methods of philanthropy deployed to induce guilty sinners to confess to their 'third category' crimes

20. Eisenstein makes no reference to the sections that follow, on vulgarity, obscenity and profanity.

21. Eisenstein omits the next clause: '*Indecent or undue exposure* is forbidden.'

22. Eisenstein omits the next clause: 'Dances which emphasize indecent movements are to be regarded as obscene.'

23. Eisenstein omits the next clause: 'Ceremonies of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled.'

24. Eisenstein omits the sections on 'National Feelings' and 'Titles'.

25. Eisenstein omits the next clause: '*The sale of women*, or a woman selling her virtue.'

26. The reference is to the tsarist secret police.
27. Eisenstein omits the second clause, which overlaps with the third.

(serious crimes, murder and any others included at the behest of the appropriate political 'bosses', who are the real rulers of the state, the city and the police apparatus.

These methods are quite up to the standard of our own former 'Third Section' [*Tret'e otdelenie*] amongst the departments of the Ministry of Home Affairs.²⁶

Sometimes they even 'catch up and overtake' it in the quantity and quality of the organized assault on those in custody.

Joseph Rumos, accused of a crime, was tied to a chair after two days of 'normal forms of assault' and his head was jerked back by his hair through the back of the chair so that his Adam's apple stood up on end. The detective – an 'unusually composed guy', as the description put it – regularly and without sparing any physical effort hit the upturned Adam's apple with such force with his knuckleduster that an unstoppable fountain of blood flowed from Joseph's throat, inundating the criminal, the butcher, the chair and floor and splattering the walls of the back room of the police station. The entertainment continued for many hours, interrupted only in order to give a rest to the sweating and panting [...] detective.

This is far from being the material from some kind of secret archive, stolen 'by the criminal hand of Moscow' from the bowels of police hiding-places in Chicago or New York.

This description is taken from a widely available three-dollar booklet, published by one of the never-ending philanthropic/hypocritical Senate commissions for the investigation of wrongdoing, exposed by one hand with the sole aim of using the other to guarantee its further unhindered flourishing and to make a fool of the onlooker through this ostentatious campaign against social ills.

In 1930 this little booklet caused a pleasant sensation in all the newspaper kiosks, the chemist's shops and the windows of the bookstores. One Polish criminal was subjected to a significantly more refined method of persuading him to confess. This giant, built like a Himalayan ox and capable of taking weeks of beating, confessed 'like a little boy' to everything the detectives wanted. When they tied him to [...] a dentist's chair and drilled out a large healthy tooth and gently warned him that the same fate would befall all his many remaining teeth, which had survived, by a mixture of their strength and the officers' imprudence, the 'first period of active curiosity' on the part of the police towards their bearer.

But let us return to our basic material and to the text of the singular binding oath that completely hands over the fate of film production to preliminary censorship, censorship during the production period and final censorship of the finished film at the solicitous hands of Will Hays's organization. The Code concludes:

Therefore be it resolved that we hereby agree to the following methods of operation:

1. When requested by production managers, the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc., shall secure any facts, information or suggestions concerning the probable reception of stories or the manner in which in its opinion they may best be treated.²⁷

2. Each production manager shall submit to the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. every picture he produces before the negative goes to the laboratory for printing. The Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc., having seen the picture, shall inform the production manager in writing whether in its opinion the picture conforms or does not conform to the Code, stating specifically wherein either by theme, treatment, or incident, the picture violates the provisions of the Code. In such latter event, the picture shall not be released until the changes indicated by the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. have been made...²⁸

In such instances of a difference of opinion with the Hays censorship, as one movie magnate put it, 'We go on taking and re-taking the scene until, like a woman losing her innocence, it loses the subversiveness that worries the censors.'

When you become a director, manager, supervisor or chairman of the firm's board, you are also swearing to follow the stated Code without exception.

If you deviate from it, compulsion will be used.

However, obscenity means money and sensation means money. And, generally speaking, money means everything.

So on our screens we see the most puzzling game of cat and mouse that the Hays organization plays with itself. More accurately [we see] the outwitting of the moral bosses of this respectable institution in the interests of their real – commercial – bosses, whenever the movie industry has a good chance of grabbing a large sum of money with a morally dubious or even altogether scandalous piece of sensationalism.

It is not without reason that from line after line of the said Code the same phrase resounds: 'subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment'.

Under powerful pressure from scandalous sensationalism 25 actual dead bodies are dragged through this loophole in the film *The Beast of the City*, which concludes with a shoot-out between the police and Chicago beer baron bandits.²⁹ In *Scarface*³⁰ just as many corpses are strewn in the path of the hero with an Al Capone scar across his face so that at the end of the film we are shown a proper siege of his armour-clad lair, where he heroically dies from asphyxiating gas bombs on the verge of an incestuous affair with his own sister, whose lover he has shot out of jealousy.

It is interesting that, like some kind of protest against the American ultra-moralists, books, scenes and even entire tragedies that are based on incestuous love are now particularly popular in the USA. (For example, O'Neill's latest trilogy about an Americanized Elektra.)³¹

The highly dubious exposure of crime in this film, which the advertising campaign makes so much of, completely dissolves into a hymn to the powerful personality of the 'strong man' [*strong-men*] to which the hearts of minor clerks and stenographers respond, recognizing in the mutual destruction of the beer barons and bandits the almost identical and equally relentless struggle between their financial bosses on the stock exchange or between social benefactors in pre-election and election battles.

28. Eisenstein omits the rest of this sentence, which states that the Board of Directors of the MPPDA has the final say in any dispute.

29. *The Beast of the City* (Charles Brabin, 1932).

30. *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932).

31. Eugene O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*, first performed in 1931, was divided into three plays with themes corresponding to *The Oresteia* trilogy by Aeschylus: *Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted*.

32. *The Big House* (George Hill, 1930).
33. The Soviet state trading organization in the United States.
34. *The Godless Girl* (1929).
35. *Hallelujah!* (1929).
36. Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910) founded the Christian Scientist movement.

In these contexts the brutal mutual destruction is for some reason considered to be civic virtue and the gladiators in these battles are seen as ideal types, towering as objects of imitation for the herds of slaves in white collars.

There is, of course, a certain educational value even in this. There is no harm in showing a parade of police fully equipped to crush those who break the law, especially to those 'other' lawbreakers who are seditiously preparing their red flags for May Day. After all a tear gas bomb does not care whom it lands on.

Sometimes you suddenly see tanks rolling across the screen, relentlessly bombarding mutinous prisoners with such bloody realism that you scarcely believe your eyes. The film is seen by millions. The film makes millions in takings. The scriptwriter gets the annual prize from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The film is an obvious commercial hit. At the same time you will also be surprised at the considerable denunciatory role that cinema has played in the fight against one of America's most terrible social mechanisms – the system of correctional prison institutions. It appears that Hays's iron code melted in the face of vigorous social agitation. But *The Big House*³² was summoned into being and functions in response to quite different stimuli and incentives. Its denunciatory role is quite fortuitous. After all, 'denunciation' can sometimes be a fruitful source for cunning exploitation. The fact is that a wave of suppressed prison mutinies provoked by inhuman treatment and conditions in America's great prison centres spread like a torrent of blood in 1929 and 1930.

Black torrents of bold headlines began to flow across square kilometres of editorials – of 'front pages' [*front-peidzhy*], which are only interested in screaming, regardless of what they scream about: today it is the abduction of the Lindbergh baby, tomorrow another record flight across a couple of oceans, yesterday badgering Amtorg³³ for imaginary dumping on the stock exchange, the day after tomorrow it will be the shooting of prisoners by organized military force.

Front-page publicity is too enticingly rich, the debates on this topic are too heated within the family circle and around the bridge tables of the 'foremost' social strata, who live by their intellectual interest in communicating to one another what each interlocutor has anyway read that morning in the very same paper.

The Hays organization obligingly screws its eyes up and suddenly on the screen the wailing of a 'social document' breaks out, emasculated, of course, of everything in its subject matter that is not 'definitely essential to the plot', but nevertheless even creating a social clamour despite the cunning manipulative stratagems of the skilled emasculators.

Moscow has seen Cecil B. DeMille's *The Godless Girl*.³⁴

*Hallelujah!*³⁵

King Vidor is doing an unheard-of thing: a film about Negroes. His final argument was to decline his salary. King Vidor is agreeing to share the risk with the company. King Vidor is working, not on a safe salary but on an uncertain percentage of the profits.

Irony is inseparable from pathos.

A true disciple of the Messiah in a skirt, the not unknown Mary Baker Eddy,³⁶ King Vidor is enchanted by the jazz ecstasy of the African Methodists.

But the methods of administering the religious narcotic and of the economic exploitation of religious feelings are so savage and grotesque in themselves that the well-intentioned religious ecstasy of the director merges through the grotesque into the full-scale buffoonery of the new Messianism.

A Negro preacher, furnished through the skilful enterprise of his black parents with a halo of sanctity, and a special Pullman coach, coupled to a freight wagon carrying a special ass, enters the city of many sins 'on an ass' like a sort of Christ, and the people pour out to meet the new coloured prophet.

In the crowd, however, there is a coloured prostitute and her pimp, witnesses at that drunken orgy at which the present preacher, then a trader selling the cotton from his father's plantation, drank away the takings and in his drunken state shot his brother, and was then illuminated by a Heavenly light and called 'to sear their hearts with words of fire'.³⁷

The prophet's recent drinking companions [*sobutyl'niki*], who had been responsible for his spending, ignore the mood of the crowd and turn completely against him.

Not batting an eyelid, the prophet calmly dismounts from his ass to the accompaniment of an angelic choir of black children dressed in white muslin gowns and with a skilled boxing blow smashes the insolently laughing mug of the disrespectful pimp.

After this he calmly continues his entry into the New Jerusalem, having transformed his boxer's fists into palms upturned towards Heaven.

But the Lord's ways are inscrutable. In one of the following reels of the film, they bring a sinful girl to the sacrament of second baptism in the waters of one of the tributaries of the Mississippi.

Ecstasy envelops the soul, turned towards God, of the sinner dipped in the cold waters of her second baptism.

The ecstasy is transmitted to the newly emerged baptiser.

The girl feels faint. She loses consciousness. The baptiser picks her up in his strong arms. He carries her to a tent by the fast-flowing river. It is only the intervention of the preacher's prudent mother that prevents the religious ecstasy from turning into something even quite embarrassing. The mother's solicitous and forceful black hand drags the black saint, who has half climbed on to the camp bed where the converted sinner is resting, away: the Lord God may enter her, but not His unworthy servant.

The ceremony of saving souls by dipping them in the waves is in full swing and the unworthy servant returns to his official drudgery.

The girl goes on to become such a zealous servant of virtue that, when her ex-pimp comes to turn her back to the path of debauchery, she hits him on the skull with a poker and with each blow she repeats in a shrill voice, 'That's what I'll do to anybody who stands between me and the salvation of my soul.'

There are many ways of bringing a dreamer who has gone too far back down to earth. If it is difficult to convince the man who made *The Big Parade*³⁸ of the financial stupidity and racial impropriety of taking up the subject of the blacks, there exists the versatile distribution network, which has the ability, by skilled tactics, to paralyse the successful run of its own production, if it is necessary as an edifying example to warn people off

37. Paraphrase of the last line of Pushkin's poem 'The Prophet' ('Prorok'), written in 1826.

38. *The Big Parade* (1925).

39. Reference to three of the major Hollywood movie moguls: William Fox (1879–1952), Jesse L. Lasky (1880–1958) and Adolph Zukor (whom Eisenstein misnames Zurok, 1873–1976).
40. *Sutter's Gold*, one of Eisenstein's failed projects for Paramount, was eventually directed by James Cruze and released in 1936.

similar enterprises, even if they are great masters like the man who made *The Big Parade*, and petty dreamers will fare even worse.

King Vidor himself told me how *Hallelujah!* had been artificially cut up by its own distributors.

The clause in the Code that governs the problem of race reigns supreme.

The losses of *Hallelujah!* are covered by the profits made by *The Big Parade*. But what are the losses in comparison with the lesson taught that Negro films do not pay, with the incontrovertible argument that remains in the arsenal of racial hatred, as one of the subtle tactics in that same class struggle against all those who may want to risk once again touching on the black taboo.

A colour film – not at all 'in natural colours' but dealing with the fate of coloured people in America – was one of the first subjects that we suggested to Paramount. Our first creative initiative was paralysed by the ice-cold fear of the company that Negro films do not pay 'given the sad experience of King Vidor's film'.

The ironic smile at the religious conceptions of an inferior race – and it is not without cunning that there was no appeal to the Code – avenges itself in this sad experience, and *Hallelujah!* shoots beyond its target, through an individual anecdote, at the religion of the system and at the 33 systems of American religion.

2.

So much has been said, written and told of how the 'bosses' of the movie industry emerged from the cosmic chaos of speculation in real-estate lots, the re-sale of second-hand clothes and the victorious ranks of manufacturers of chewing gum, natural and artificial fertilizers that I do not want to broach this subject again. It is better to use living people to touch upon the latest curious conflict within the leadership of the movie industry, which in 1930 completed the first thirty years of the first stage of American cinema. I was a living witness to everything that has been completely wiped out by the 'mighty hurricane' of the Wall Street crash and the general crisis of the economic depression.

Fox, Lasky, Zurok³⁹ and the other veterans of American cinema are now, as a result of the Depression, definitively 'out of the game'. I caught them and saw them, these lions of the movie industry, these heroes of the highway, the first pioneers who on horse and cart went to open up cinema – California, just as some time in 1848 the bands of gold diggers streamed to open up the California gold deposits. Not the celluloid gold of Hollywood but the gold dust of the Sacramento River, on the rich fields of the estate of General Johan Sutter, the hero of another of our rejected subjects, the California gold fever of the 1840s.⁴⁰

The bosses were really scared to allow 'Bolsheviks' near the subject of gold.

The typical old movie mogul, the typical movie adventurer, the desperate gambler in the dark – and the darker the better – was distinguished by his scope, his imagination and his irrepressible fascination with the risk of the game.

Even now America bets on everything it can. Half the hullabaloo of election campaigns is stirred up by the fact that a huge pile of bets is

placed on the head of a particular candidate, like the bets placed on the leather gloves of a particular boxer, the legs of a horse in a trotting race or the paws of a greyhound.

As in the days of the great Mark Twain, every year giant frogs jump a distance for a bet in the San Francisco area.

Participants in the totalizator greedily crowd around the log-book tables of ocean steamers, around the tote, to see who will guess the precise number of knots that the ocean skyscraper will sail in the next 24 hours.

Our own involuntary five-week sojourn on the border between Mexico and the USA at Washington's behest enabled quite a few dollars to change hands amongst those in the Hollywood film world who were waging bets on whether we would be readmitted to the land of Major Pease.⁴¹

This once typical movie operator – adventurer, dreamer, sportsman, poet of profit – is being replaced by prosaic figures – adventurers, not of the boundless prairies and the pampas, but of the dry clatter of the adding machines, banking operations and stock exchange ventures.

I was present at the final rounds of the death struggle between the old romantics and pioneers of the movie industry and the dry bureaucrats – Wall Street place-men with no initiative, bureaucratically avoiding anything that was not guaranteed in advance to make an absolutely sure return.

In their hands there is a soporific shroud of endless repetition and a smothering of creative initiatives, which, contrary to all logic, nevertheless once in a while does escape on to the shores of golden California.

These cut-throats are devoid of even the halo of romanticism. But the last word in the battle was theirs...

It is staggering that, with their arrival, the accuracy of bank accounting and the precise calculation of stock exchange speculation have not taken root in the chaotic factory kitchen of Hollywood production.

Nowhere will you come across a greater thirst for the mysterious gifts of the God Success, a more panic-stricken trepidation before Him and a more complete ignorance of how best to summon Him up, to serve Him, to oblige Him.

Chaos. Chaos. And more chaos.

Chaos in everything that in the least deviates from the process begun by a simple turn of the starting handle of automatic machines or of the endless run of the conveyor belt of technical processes.

In everything that is not an electromechanical, physical or chemical process of pure technology.

Or in anything creative that can, through endless repetition of a worn-out cliché, be reduced to the level of dull automatism: standard lighting, the standard shot, the standard arrangement of the shots [*raskadrovka*] and a standard Tom Mix on a standard mare.⁴²

A total disorientation as to what is needed, how it is needed, what is good, what is bad, and even what is more or less profitable – which is in the final analysis what this game of blind man's bluff they play with themselves is all about.

The voice of the prudent calls repeatedly for the endless repetition of what was once successful.

41. Eisenstein and his team had to wait on the border for almost six weeks to gain permission for a transit visa to enable them to leave Mexico, after work on *Que viva Mexico!* was terminated, to sail back across the Atlantic to Europe in early 1932.

42. Tom Mix (1880–1940), actor in westerns.

43. Carl Laemmle (1867–1939), ‘father of Universal’ from its foundation in 1912 until financial troubles resulting from the Great Depression forced him out in 1936.

44. Alfonso XIII (1886–1941), King of Spain from 1906 to 1931, when the Second Republic was proclaimed and he went into exile.

45. An early form of dictating machine, invented and produced in Germany.

The voice of the madmen always calls for sensation of any kind, from the dancing of new feet or bellies on Broadway stages to the next crowned Bourbon who has recently lost his inherited throne.

‘You think Trotsky could write a script?’ This was the first question asked on my first acquaintance with old Laemmle, Hollywood’s ‘Uncle Carl’, head of Universal, one of the early pioneers into the unknown of what was then still the infant movie industry.⁴³

In response I shrugged my shoulders in confusion at the palm cupped to his deaf ear, like an ear trumpet in expectation of a reply.

‘Would he come to be filmed?’ the old man continued, still seeking an answer, and soon after that he sent a telegraphed invitation to be filmed – but to Alfonso of Spain.⁴⁴

Hollywood works on quantity rather than quality.

The uncle of one of my acquaintances used to say, ‘Don’t let a single girl slip by, or you’ll miss the good one.’

This is roughly how Hollywood is supplied with scripts, stars, writers, directors, musicians and designers.

Everything is bought up. In a hurry and from under one another’s noses. Throwing tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars away, these things are amassed under the rays of the California sun, which shines all year round.

They all drink hard, break the traffic rules and speed limits in their phenomenal automobiles, when the policeman is not looking, paying him off when he catches up with the lawbreakers on his motorcycle; they get tanned in the sun’s rays, smearing themselves thickly with cream against sunburn, they bathe in the ocean, but the most important thing is that they regularly receive their weekly cheque, for which in sudden fits of conscience they spend a quarter of an hour pretending to think up schemes for the creation of eternal values.

Then it gradually becomes clear that 90 per cent of these people, famous somewhere for their imaginary or real qualities, turn out to be of no possible use to cinema and the series of magnificent receptions for the new arrivals at the pseudo-Spanish style mansions of movie magnates and stars give way to noiseless departures for home with the cheque books for their bulging current accounts.

In the firm’s loss columns a new batch of tens of thousands of dollars is written off, while the obliging triangle of the customary scraper removes the black letters of a departing surname from the frosted glass of the personal suite of one of the celebrities who had occupied it in a row of 30 to 40 scriptwriter’s offices or 20 director’s offices.

A week later the black letters of the surname of a new celebrity will appear on the frosted glass and beyond the door the next new luminary will sit bored, yawning and catching flies while he awaits the appointed hour for his encounter on the golf links with another imported wonder.

If, contrary to expectations, the germ of a fruitful idea should wander into the head of the next celebrity, he will have to wait about ten days before he can get an appointment with the production manager who will give him three minutes to blurt out what, to everyone’s sincere distress, had the temerity to enter his head, against the noise of telephones, Dictaphones and the hoarse shouts from the Parlograph.⁴⁵

You see, the presence of this luminary is dictated primarily by advertising considerations while the real staff brokers deal with the day-to-day work.

If, contrary to expectations, after such a stay of many weeks, there remains, following the departure of the dramaturgical genius, a rachitic infant in the shape of a squeaky last remnant of the golden days of that stay then this semi-practical original will fall into the clutches of experienced midwives who will contrive to make it into the hundred and first version of the same old story of the eternal triangle.

Generally speaking the new arrival faces a double dilemma: should he sacrifice his individual character and convictions and clamber aboard the golden merry-go-round, happily baking happy confections, like Lubitsch, or, take the tragic view and forsake the Promised Land, as Reinhardt did?⁴⁶

Or should he stick unswervingly to his principles and, without forsaking Hollywood opportunely, exchange his director's microphone, like the 'von' (Stroheim), for an actor's megaphone and play a director in a wretched and implausible role in the film *The Lost Squadron*, a pitiful caricature parodying himself in his earlier days as a director.⁴⁷

People will ask me how Hollywood, given all this disorganization, muddle and chaos, contrives in defiance of everything to flood the home and world markets with a sufficient, not to say excessive, number of films?

On the railways, whether you like it or not, there will inevitably be a certain number of accidents year in year out.

Out of a hundred scripts there will inevitably be one that works, even if it has to be reworked.

Do you need a hundred scripts?

Assume 10 per cent are suitable.

And Hollywood buys up 10,000.

When a business is not conducted on a scientifically based analysis and the logic of the results of taking into account long years of experience, the enterprise will inevitably be drawn into a wild outburst of unaccountable twists and turns, of accumulation of excessive numbers of staff and of wasteful expenditures counting entirely on statistical probabilities: for a hundred bits of rubbish, one, two, three are worthwhile.

The enormous disparity between expenditure and income in the movie industry serves as the basis for this chaos of disorganization.

The mistakes and the groping in the dark of a handful of dim-witted producers is more than compensated for by the stupidity of the many millions of consumers who, in their insatiable thirst for spectacle, are prepared to swallow any rubbish.

Furthermore, the viewer is safely shackled to the fetters of the chain system of cinemas that work according to the fully refined methods of compulsory choice.

3.

The chaos of the system as a whole.⁴⁸

Chaos within a particular instance of industry – the movie industry.

The absence of systematic organization and logic in the economic forms of this industry echoes and inevitably determines the same lack of

46. Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947), German-born film director of light comedies characterized by what was called 'the Lubitsch touch'. Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), German-born stage and screen director, whose distinguished and influential career on the German stage came to an end when Hitler came to power in 1933. Reinhardt's one Hollywood film was a version of his earlier stage production at the Hollywood Bowl of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, released in 1935.

47. This paragraph was omitted from the *International Literature* translation. Erich von Stroheim (1885–1957), Austrian-born director and actor, whose career as film director faded in the early 1930s but who continued to act in films until the mid-1950s. *The Lost Squadron* (George Archainbaud, 1932).

48. The section from here until further indicated was omitted from the *International Literature* translation.

49. *City Lights* (1931).

50. Eisenstein deliberately uses the Russian words *unizhennyi* and *oskorblennyi* from the title of the novel by Fedor Dostoevskii.

system, the absence of differentiation and of constructive logic in the sphere of individual creativity.

The problem of creativity is not generally posed as a problem, and is generally not on the agenda for any branch of cinema in Hollywood.

There can be no talk of exchanging experience. Professional secrets are closed. Secrecy.

This is the result of the struggle to survive in the feverish chaos of the competition for creative production in Hollywood.

The metaphysics and fatalism of the bourgeoisie's blind subjugation to the 'mysterious laws of economics' also dictate a superstitiously mystical attitude even to problems of creativity and creative analysis. In those rare cases when the matter is discussed it is replaced by snivelling phrases about life-like veracity and truthful closeness to life.

I have been watching one of the most brilliant cinematic masters at work: he is matchless in terms of the results of his work and, alas, completely powerless in terms of its methods.

The studio is Charlie Chaplin's.

The film is *City Lights*.⁴⁹

They are shooting the boxing scene.

We fear and tremble on the set. It really is Charlie Chaplin.

A director [*rezhisser*] can overwhelm you. A director can stupefy you. A director can distract you with his high-flown theories.

But a film-maker [*postanovshchik*] is helpless and exposed on all sides to review by the venerable public, when he is caught in the creative moment of the act of film-making.

Twenty minutes watching a film-maker working reveals more about his method of work than multiple volumes of philosophical work about his personality and his creative principles.

This was a firework display of cumulative brilliant tricks and inspirations, of comic movements and positions that were continually heaped up around the basic situation of a knocked-about 'insulted and humiliated'⁵⁰ Chaplin standing in for a professional boxer who has been injured, so that he can raise the money to pay for an eye operation to restore the sight of the blind girl whom he loves.

As always with Chaplin the motivation is sentimentally compassionate. In the pre-fight changing room the sentimental becomes comic when Chaplin suddenly discovers that his opponent is not the young lad he had bribed and reached an understanding with but an intractable, violent and pugnacious stranger.

In the ring the fight is transformed into pure slapstick in which professional boxing is replaced by some sort of rhythmic likeness of metrically rhythmic action so that it ends with an unforgettable scene when a leather glove falls from an iron nail on the lifeless body of Chaplin, lying as if dead on a table, hitting him on the nose, and Chaplin comes to, in mortal terror, only in order to collapse into an indescribable faint from fear.

The scene was shot in the ring.

I heard that it had been in the process of shooting for several weeks. I knew that, even after our visit, several weeks and kilometres of film were wound around that ring...

These twenty minutes, however, revealed the secret of this devouring of shooting time and filmic space.

The methods that percolate through the economic structure of production from top to bottom do in fact percolate from bottom to top. Orthodox direction is concerned, having hit upon a brilliant discovery, with seizing it in the pincers of conscious reworking and taking it to the stage that Gogol designated by the clumsy term 'pearl of creation'.⁵¹

This requires a precise realization of one's purpose. It requires a possession of directorial 'foresight', which, as distinct from the cameraman's simple 'sight', is the principal prerequisite for the director's craft.

Chaplin does not work like that.

Instead of a qualitative deepening of an already selected version of the subject, he works on it in breadth, by using secondary stunts, he runs off in endless parallel, incomplete versions, without working through any of them to completion, he shoots them an endless number of times in the hope that one of them will turn out to be conclusively brilliant when it is developed. Given the unlimited shooting time and the brilliant genius of the man, this 'of course' always happens eventually without fail.

Then this all splashes out on to the screen of the viewing room and Chaplin, curled up on the famous black leather armchair, selects from the hundred accidental versions the accidentally most successful or, if he does not find any, goes back to the studio to shoot another dozen.

The filming continues.

But Chaplin, evidently, cannot bear the involuntary disapproval of our eyes for his method of work, work that in itself we have the very greatest admiration for.

After twenty minutes he stops the shoot.

We go off together for lunch, plunging into interminable discussions and immersing the crowded ark of the studio in silent hours of idleness.

Well, Charlie Chaplin is his own boss.⁵²

The hours of idleness themselves present a certain lordly style to visitors.

Chaplin is not alone with his system. I have observed the same style of working, with different levels of giftedness, with Abel Gance in Paris and Fritz Lang in Berlin.⁵³

The opportunity to manage without creative rationalization thanks to the conditions in which the great masters work and the absence of creative prerequisites for the clichéd works that are confectioned by small fry of lesser calibre are another reason why the analysis of creativity and creative methods is nowhere mentioned on the Hollywood agenda.

Even the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which has made a considerable effort to summarize the experience of sound film, from the first timid steps in sound technology to the magnificent technical achievements of the present day, has never once posed questions about the aims and objectives of applying and using the fantastic instrument of sound technology that recent cinema technology has placed at the disposal of the creative worker.⁵⁴

Where there is no clear-cut analytical scientific investigation of the organization and the technology of the creative process, there can be no question of systematic training for the younger generation, of a rational

51. Allusion to Chapter 7 of Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

52. In 1919 Chaplin, with Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and D.W. Griffith, had co-founded United Artists to give film-makers more control over their own work.

53. Abel Gance (1889–1981), French film director and one of the first to use multiple screens, as in his *Napoléon* (1927). Fritz Lang (1890–1976), Austrian-born film director, one of the major figures in German Expressionist cinema and later in Hollywood film noir.

54. The hiatus in the *International Literature* translation ends at this point.

55. William DeMille (1878–1955), screenwriter and director, less well known than his elder brother, Cecil B.
56. The next hiatus in the *International Literature* translation begins here.
57. The *International Literature* translation resumes with the next paragraph.

organization of film education, and of the organization in general terms of a film education that goes beyond the Shamanistic adventurism of privately owned speculative 'film studios' that, more often than not, supply young people for other purposes.

But the knee-jerk reactions of conscious self-preservation in the merciless hourly struggle with the competition require that the Promised Land of creative film phenomena be encircled with a triple ring of barbed wire.

Not only are the younger generation not trained.

They are fenced off by triple bolts on impenetrable gates.

A circular letter from the past president of the Academy, William DeMille,⁵⁵ which has been spread across the pages of every newspaper belonging to every owner in the United States asserts:

It is necessary to adopt measures to convince youth that it is unnecessary in Hollywood. The situation is a strained one as there is an excess of unemployed in all branches of movie production.

Out of 17,500 extras registered in 1930 at central casting only 883 had on an average one day's employment a week and only 95 worked three days a week.

Of the 7,000 actors and actresses registered with central casting, only six or seven got work every day. If you divide this number of work calls equally amongst everyone registered with central casting it would mean that each actor might get a part once every three years.

When the industry finds itself in a position where it cannot provide work for its tried and tested actors, any attempt at a breakthrough by the young is tantamount to suicide.⁵⁶

On a level with the position in commerce and industry, there is a similar complete absence of a contingent of a creative film public in the sense of a leading group of creative activists carrying out broad creative mass work, as we understand it. (We may well understand but, for reasons that nobody understands, we have not yet carried it out.)⁵⁷

There is really only one path open to creative youth, the path to suicide or to grovelling in a fruitless search for protection amongst the countless relatives of the movie magnates who grace their company.

That was written in February 1931.

Now, when film productions are dislocated and when it is considered good taste amongst the Hollywood snobs, who were yesterday showing off to one another the length of their Lincolns and Packards, to wear threadbare jackets and worn-out boots for show and to complain about the lack of money in places where even hinting about financial problems was enough to stop you being received in a single 'decent' home.

Now, when stars who once shone alone through an entire film are forced to sparkle in constellations of five or six luminaries in a single picture with a corresponding fragmentation of the laurels, the ordinary mortal who once regularly played leading roles is inevitably sometimes propelled by economic pressure into the ranks of despised extras so that he can feed himself between roles.

4.

The world's most perfect technical apparatus has been summoned to serve this poverty of ideas, thought and creative mismanagement. Here, to balance the sombre hues of the picture I have painted so far, we must hymn not just the actual achievements of the technology but also the endless reserves of labour, energy, time and money that have been expended to resolve the minutest practical and technical problem and detail.

The skyscrapers of the research laboratories devoted to acoustics and the perfection of the microphone; the re-equipment of entire million-dollar sound buildings and installations so as to record sound; the constant improvement in the method and means of chemical processing; the persistent and unswerving struggle to increase the light sensitivity of the emulsion – all this transforms the apparently lifeless field of production technology into a continuous and brilliant stream of constant improvement, development and technical triumphs.

Rational differentiation of the executive apparatus, a high level of qualification for the individual units that constitute it, a dizzying speed of shooting and supplying newsreels and the availability of specialist newsreel cinemas; the ability to respond to the facts and events of our existing reality, be it for false reasons, for esoteric reasons, or in pursuit of sensation, but with enough flexibility and speed; a brilliantly functioning distribution network of cinemas, albeit on a commercial rather than a cultural footing but covering the whole of America right down to the smallest settlements; and lastly the huge scale of the movie industry as a whole, which gives it a place of honour, third in importance, in the large-scale industry of the United States, and hence secures it a strong material base for continuous technical development – all this cannot fail to make us think long and hard about all these points, against which we are double sinners, living in a system of unlimited planned socialist scale, which, given a rational approach, gives us incomparably broader scope in every area than the system of decaying capitalism.

While we can say that on many points on the ambiguous list at the beginning of this article we have caught up with the Americans, we must bear in mind, with steadfast and stubborn persistence and passionate enthusiasm, the slogan 'Catch up and overtake' what is positive in the achievements of the class enemy.

The uncompromising realization of this slogan and a guarantee that our ideology and our content are fully armed with the technology that 'in the period of reconstruction decides everything' – that is the Bolshevik task that confronts our cinema as a whole at the moment of its triumphant entry into the Second Five-Year Plan.⁵⁸

Contributor details

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58. The First Five-Year Plan (1928–33) was deemed to have been completed one year early, so the Second ran from 1933 to 1937.

Cinema (1991, 1994) and *Eisenstein Rediscovered* (1993) with Ian Christie, and *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema* (1993) with Derek Spring. He has also edited and part-translated the five-volume British Film Institute edition of Eisenstein's writings in English and is General Editor of the *KINO* series of studies of Russian and Soviet Cinema for I.B. Tauris.

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Eisenstein's silent films on DVD

Richard Taylor (Swansea, Wales)

Sergei Eisenstein, Silent Classics, Vol. 1: Strike, Battleship Potemkin, October
Tartan DVD 1925/1928, 3 PAL DVDs, Region Code 0, 2007

Strike, Image Entertainment ID4588DSDVD, 1 NTSC DVD, Region Code 1,
1999

Panzerkreuzer Potemkin: Das Jahr 1905, Transit Classics 8697099149,
1 PAL DVD plus booklet, Region Code 2, 2007

Battleship Potemkin: From the Series 'The Year 1905', Kino International
K558A/B, 2 NTSC DVDs, Region Code not specified, 2007

Die Generallinie, Absolut Medien Arte Edition 856, ISBN 3-89848-856-X,
1 PAL DVD plus booklet, Region Code 0, 1999

It is difficult to understand the rationale for the 2007 Tartan set of Eisenstein's first three completed silent films. Is it a spoiler for the much better versions of *Strike* and *The Battleship Potemkin* now available on other labels? Or is the justification, as the box cover suggests, purely and simply the new scores by Ed Hughes and the New Music Players for those two films? If the latter, it seems somewhat self-indulgent as little or no attempt has been made by the production company to enhance the images or improve the intertitles in the process of digital transfer. On the contrary, the image quality is as poor as it was on the old Hendring videos, which means that it is a lot poorer than it should be for the twenty-first-century DVD viewer, obscuring the true wealth of Eisenstein's (and Tisse's) frame compositions, the *mise-en-cadre* that complements the much better known process of montage, the juxtaposition of shots to produce a specific psychological (and sometimes physiological) effect and emotional affect.

Let us take the films in chronological order, beginning with *Strike*, released in 1925. The case for this film contains the only printed annotation for the entire Tartan set: it is a characteristically sparse leaflet and concerns itself entirely with the new scores. Laura Marcus writes a brief paean to these scores but tells us nothing about the historical, political or cultural context of the original exhibition and reception of the films. It is not at all clear what the purpose of this contribution is: it is hardly helpful to a viewer coming to Eisenstein for the first time – or, for that matter, subsequently. The composer, Ed Hughes, provides a longer and more interesting note about his scores and the relationship between them and the films but a more substantial essay would have been much more illuminating.

The credits on the back page of this leaflet are devoted entirely to the score and its recording, with no details being given of the authors of the original film. This is not merely self-indulgent, but perverse.

Those whose ears are more attuned to the sound of electronic music than are this reviewer's may find that the new score enhances their understanding and enjoyment of the film. The Dolby transfers were beautifully clear, clearer alas than the image quality.

The same faults apply to the Tartan *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*. *Battleship Potemkin* is alluded to briefly in the composer's note for *Strike* but there is no annotation for *October* at all. This is barely credible. The choice of intertitles is bizarre: Russian titles are available for the Hughes and Kriukov soundtracks for *The Battleship Potemkin* but not for the Meisel version, which is, for some infuriating reason, on the *October* DVD, and is based on a different print! The print of *October* will be familiar to old hands, as, alas, will the dreadful pastiche of Shostakovich on the soundtrack, for it is the 1967 restoration, directed by Eisenstein's associate, Grigorii Aleksandrov.

Happily, for two of these three films, much better versions are available. Almost a decade ago the digitally re-mastered version of *Strike* was issued with a new score performed by the Alloy Orchestra and an excellent audio commentary by Yuri Tsivian, which is a model of its kind. There are some minor errors of detail that have been carried over from an earlier video release and should have been corrected. Among these errors, the co-author of the scenario, Valerian Pletnev, because of whom Eisenstein resigned from Proletkult in 1925 (see the exchange of letters in *The Eisenstein Collection*), is rendered as Valerii Pletnyakov, and the towns of Kostroma and Yaroslavl are misspelt in the English intertitles. But these are minor quibbles and the DVD has been an inspiration for subsequent DVD transfers, if not always, as the Tartan case suggests, a model to be copied.

In 2007 the Deutsche Kinemathek completed a long programme of painstaking restoration of Eisenstein's most famous film, *The Battleship Potemkin*, under the leadership of Enno Patalas and issued in Germany on the Transit label. This version is quite simply a revelation. No stone has been left unturned to bring the viewer the best possible audio-visual version of the film, using prints in German, Russian and British archives, and recording a new version of the Meisel score that played such a significant part in the film's sensational success in Berlin. The DVD includes an illuminating documentary tracing the process of restoration and confronting the issues that had to be confronted in that process. The DVD is issued as a 'Digi-Buch', and includes a superb booklet edited by Anna Bohn. This Transit DVD is definitely a model for the treatment of classic films and everybody concerned deserves our heartfelt thanks. This set has German and Russian intertitles and the booklet is only in German. But all is not lost!

Kino have issued the same DVD in the United States of America with English intertitles. This also includes the documentary but a separate and much smaller booklet has been prepared for the American market. It is not as comprehensive as the German booklet, but is streets ahead of the annotation for the Tartan set. For English-language viewers who do not speak or read German, the Kino DVD can be recommended without reservation as the best available.

The General Line, like *Strike*, has been available on DVD since 1999, in this case as part of a series promoted by the Franco-German cultural satellite television station Arte. Other Soviet silent films recently released on the Absolut-Medien label include excellent versions of the Kozintsev and Trauberg films, *New Babylon* and *Alone*, produced for the Shostakovich centenary in 2006. The picture quality for *The General Line* is superb and the film has a new score by the Ukrainian-born composer Taras Bujevski. There is a useful booklet with this DVD, but again, everything is in German or German and Russian. Two copies of this DVD that I viewed had a pressing fault which made them stick on Chapter 21, but that should not be a general problem. This DVD can be recommended to German and Russian speakers, but it is a great pity that it is not available with English subtitles, as it is significantly longer than versions available in English.

This leaves *October*, arguably one of Eisenstein's most interesting films, both politically and aesthetically, still in need of a restoration worthy of the film's importance. *Faute de mieux*, this reviewer would still not recommend the Tartan version!

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